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WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA

NORTH CAROLINA Wildlife RESOURCES COMMISSION

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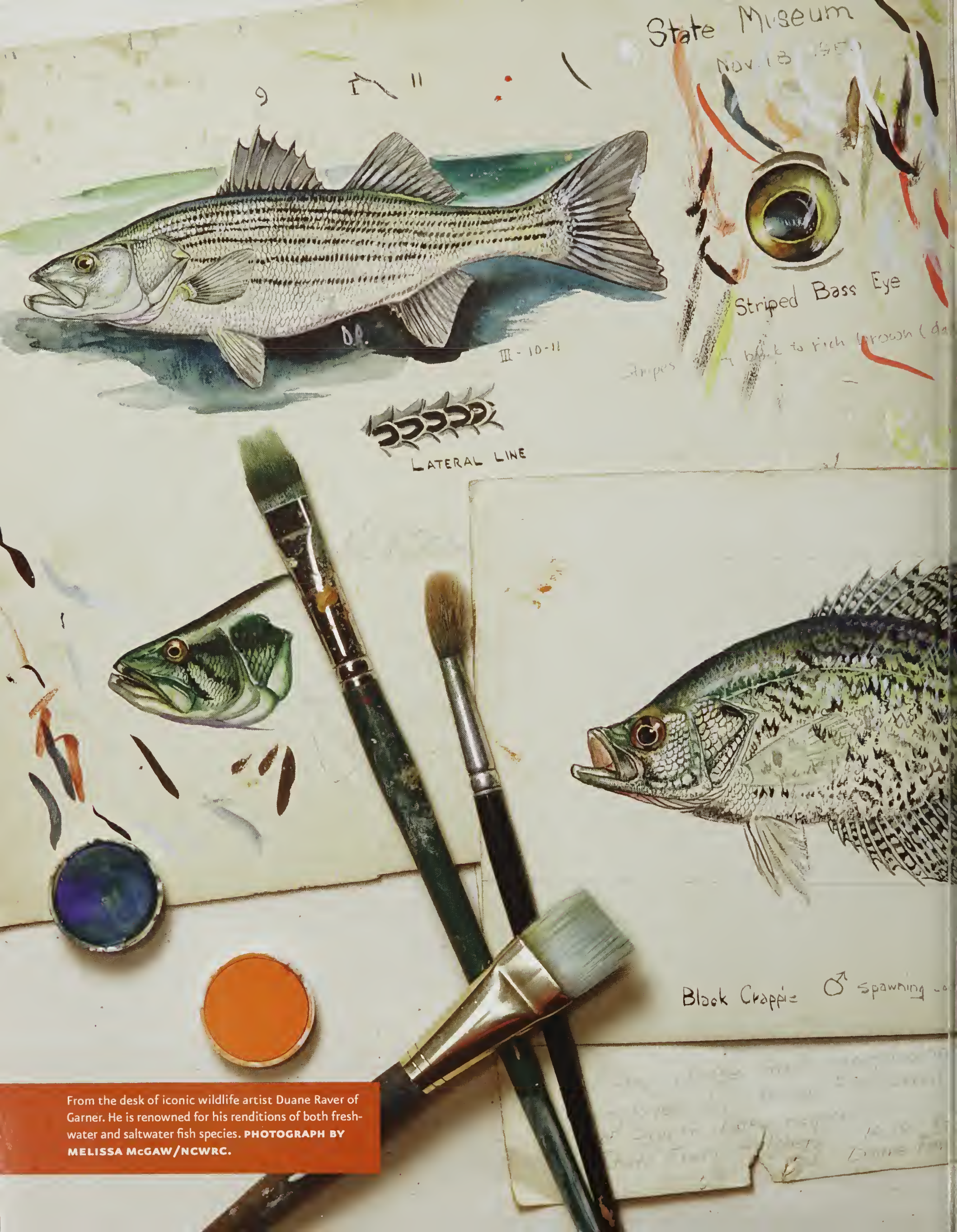

From the desk of iconic wildlife artist Duane Raver of Garner. He is renowned for his renditions of both freshwater and saltwater fish species. **PHOTOGRAPH BY MELISSA McGAW/NCWRC.**

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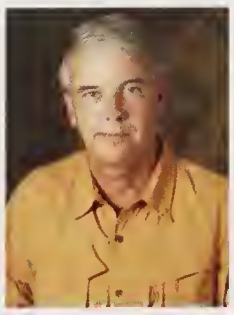
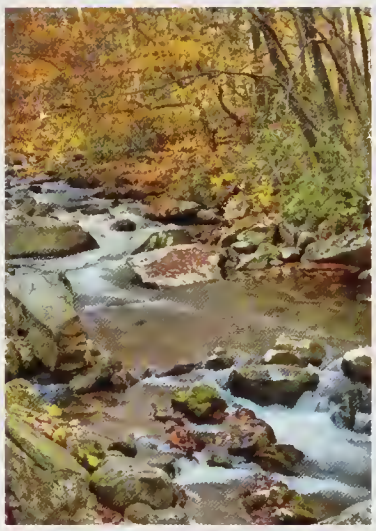
Cover: A redhead decoy by Joey Eubanks reflects the style typical of Core Sound craftsmen. This drake won best of show at the Core Sound Decoy Festival in 2007. PHOTOGRAPH BY MELISSA McGAW/NCWRC.

Wildlife in North Carolina is the official educational publication of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. It is dedicated to the sound conservation of North Carolina's wildlife and other interrelated natural resources and also to the environment we share with them.



EDITOR'S NOTE



ROBERT LYNN

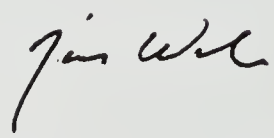
When I was growing up, most people took seriously the admonition that children should be seen and not heard. As a child I took it a step further and determined that I should be seen as little as possible, too, and thus perfected the trick of slipping out one door when company entered the other, usually on Sunday afternoons. That led to long, silent walks along the creek bank, sometimes all the way to Kerr Lake where I could sit and watch the water and think about fish I had yet to catch, coveys of quail I had yet to find.

Sitting silently and watching is a fine way to learn, and often times seems like a lost art. I try to practice it as often as I can. Some of my most vivid memories have been born of silence, such as a good hour once spent in a turkey blind watching a red-bellied woodpecker excavate a hole in a dead sweetgum tree. There was also that early gray winter day recently when I missed several trout on a Surry County stream because I became too interested in watching some wood ducks swimming downriver. The sights have been many and varied—a pair of Canada geese appearing silently from the mists of the Alligator River in Hyde County, the mournful call of tundra swans overhead at Lake Mattamuskeet.

Silent sitting and watching can be productive in town also. Recently one Sunday morning while drinking coffee on our deck in Pilot Mountain I heard a soft "cluck" and watched as a hen turkey, followed by seven poults, emerged from the woods, backed up by another hen. At night, my wife and I can often hear the somewhat eerie call of a hunting screech owl.

Silence is often second nature for many hunters and fishermen. It can be a tool, but more often is an expression of who we are, of how we enjoy the outdoors and indeed life. Those of us who are prone to silence tend to fish and hunt with those who share that need.

As an angler, I took to heart Izaak Walton's closing words to "The Compleat Angler"—"Study to be quiet"—even before I knew that book. I remember those words most days, and as this is my final editor's note before I retire, it seems like an adequate note on which to leave. Although some might say Will Rogers' warning, "never miss a good chance to shut up," might work equally as well.



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WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA

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Another Look at Farming

I thought that the "New Hunter Gatherers" article in the [September/October] issue reflected a very narrow view of food and farming. I know that the views of the author are not necessarily the views of the editors or the commission. Here are a couple of the statements made in this article that could have been handled better:

(1) "Venison is a healthy alternative to animals raised in feed lots and injected with who knows what ... we don't need meat shipped from hundreds or even thousands of miles away."

Well, yes, venison is healthy and so is beef, pork and poultry. As for local sourcing, much of the pork, poultry and eggs sold in N.C. grocery stores was raised right here in North Carolina, a leading state for pork and poultry production. And growers' protocols for the veterinary care of farm animals limits drug treatments to sick animals, just like doctors treat sick people.

(2) "The eggs from backyard chickens are much higher in healthy Omega 3 fatty acids than those from the sad creatures that spend their entire, abject lives inside tiny enclosures within industrial poultry houses."

Animals are raised indoors for a number of reasons, one of which is to keep them healthy and safe. I do not know of any farmers who would willingly spend a career husbanding animals that they thought were living miserable lives. If folks are consuming eggs for the Omega 3s, then there are specialty eggs in the grocery store produced from hens fed on Omega 3-rich diets. All eggs have Omega 3s, but some have more because the hens' diets are supplemented with things like flax and fish oil, not because of the environment where they were raised.

(3) "One of the best ways to keep rural America rural is to support local farmers' markets ... Buying from just down the road is so much better than purchasing these items from supermarkets that have flown in foodstuffs from far away."

Yes, farmers markets are a great way to retail produce to the consumer, and they are a great destination market for individuals and families, but most folks need access to supermarkets, too, and there is nothing qualitatively different about the produce and meats provided at your favorite local retailer. Either way works great.

Please remember that North Carolina farmers protect habitat, engage in conservation practices, and offer access to wildlife, hunting, fishing and open spaces. Their farms consist of all sizes and all types of production, to suit the full range of consumer demand, and please don't single out any one type as inferior to another.

I encourage anyone to visit the site feedthedialoguenc.com. It is a joint effort of the N.C. Soybean Producers Association, N.C. Cattlemen's Association, N.C. Pork Council, N.C. Poultry Federation, and N.C. Farm Bureau to foster a frank and open discussion about farming and food.

Charles Hall, CEO
N.C. Soybean Producers Association Inc.
Raleigh

Crow Hunting?

As an evolutionary biologist/animal behaviorist, I found the July/August information on our having an open season on crow hunting disturbing. Quality research at the University of Vermont, the University of Washington and elsewhere has demonstrated that crows are intelligent problem-solvers, tool users, engage in play activities, can recognize and discriminate among human faces, have semantic messages in their calls and live as long as 30 years.

It's not surprising that the great Southern writer, William Faulkner, once said that he wanted to be reincarnated as a crow. As a southerner I always obeyed my two grandfathers' rule: If you kill it, you will eat it.

Let's hope the harvesters of our great North Carolina corvid, *Corvus brachrhynchos*, enjoyed their Independence Day feast while obeying the same rule and did indeed "eat crow."

Hal J. Daniel, III
Professor Emeritus, East Carolina University
Otter Creek Preserve
Falkland

Promote the Lifetime License

As a lifetime sportsman's license holder since 1982, I would like to see published in your magazine the total of the endowment fund so all could see the good that it does with extra funds for the Wildlife Resources Commission.

I was disappointed when you stopped publishing the totals and would like to see it re-introduced in your magazine in the future.

I think if the fund was advertised/promoted more there would be many other new buyers.

Every member of my family, except my dad, are Lifetime Sportsman license holders and I cannot think of a better gift other than the infant category. Man, what a deal!

The hunters and fishermen of North Carolina pay for the commission to do what they do. Promote it and maybe there will be more!

Jack Lamb
Durham

Editor's Note: Authorship Correction
WINC misidentified Dr. Melanie Beckman as one of the authors of "The Life and Death of Mr. Bisbing" in the in September/October issue.

write us *Letters should be sent via e-mail to* **letters@ncwildlife.org** *or through regular mail to Letters,* Wildlife in North Carolina *magazine, 1712 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1712. Please include your name, address and daytime phone number. Letters chosen for publication may be edited for clarity and length. Associate Editor Mike Zlotnicki may be reached at 919-707-0175. To subscribe call 1-800-786-2721.*

How Not to Kill a Big Buck

WRITTEN BY MARTY SHAFFNER

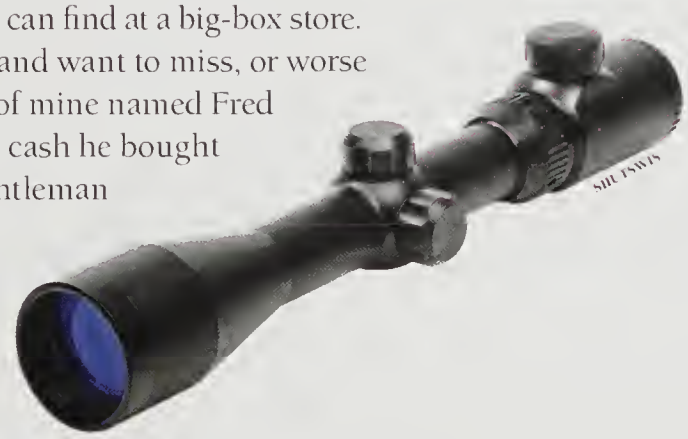
Follow these simple rules and you're all but guaranteed to come home empty-handed.

Every season more hunters take to the woods in North Carolina in pursuit of white-tailed deer than any other game animal. Most hunters, whether they will admit it or not, have dreams of harvesting a trophy buck but most rarely accomplish that goal. Unlike most deer hunting articles, I'm going to share with you a few tips on how NOT to kill a trophy whitetail buck. Between my own failures over the years and some of my friends' unsuccessful hunts (any names mentioned have been changed to protect the guilty, so Bill you don't have anything to worry about), along with stories heard from other hunters, I have compiled a list of tips to follow if you don't want to worry about harvesting a nice buck.

Some of you are probably already following some of these tips and it does have advantages. Look at all the money you have saved over the years in taxidermy bills, ammo, meat processing and other costs associated with taking a nice buck, not to mention the hard work you have saved yourself by not having to field dress, drag and skin those big bucks!

Don't waste your money on good optics

Most hunters spend every penny they can spare on their rifle and end up buying a cheap scope in a blister pack and the cheapest rings and bases they can find at a big-box store. Perfect, if you want problems keeping your rifle sighted in and want to miss, or worse yet, wound and lose the biggest buck of your life. A friend of mine named Fred was looking for a scope for his slug gun, but being short on cash he bought a used low-end scope from, and I use the term loosely, a gentleman for a real bargain, or so he thought.



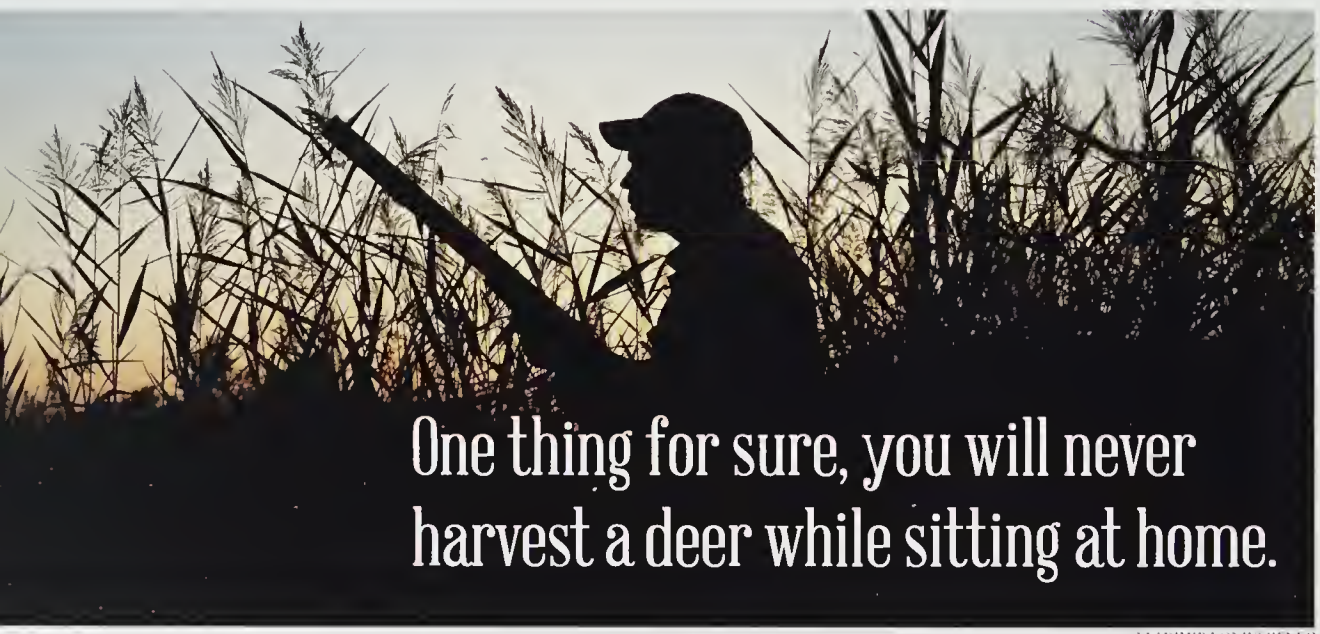
Fred thought he was set for deer season until he started trying to sight in his slug gun. After shooting almost all of his expensive sabot slugs, Fred and the guys helping him determined that the scope was blown up and unable to hold zero. A lot of hunters think they can get by with a lower end scope on their muzzleloader or slug gun, but the opposite is true. Both kick like rented mules and heavy recoil is not good on cheap scopes. Cheap scopes can't take hard recoil for long before they won't hold zero. A friend of mine said he once put a cheap scope on his .300 Winchester magnum, and after the first shot the crosshairs looked like a bad drawing on an Etch A Sketch.

DMITRII KISELEV

Buy the best scope and binoculars you can afford, and if it means buying a slightly lower-end rifle then so be it. I know everybody wants a really nice rifle, but several big-name gun manufacturers have entry-level rifles for between $350 to $450 that will shoot better than most high-end rifles would 20 years ago. Take the money you'll save and buy a good quality scope and quality rings and bases or some of the newer one-piece mount and ring combos such as Game Reaper or Talley. You will never regret money spent on a quality optics setup for your rifle.

I wouldn't worry about binoculars if I were you either. Who needs to be able to pick out deer you wouldn't be able see with your naked eye or positively identify that 2½-year-old 8-pointer (which could be your next trophy buck in a year or two) from a 4½-year-old trophy? You can just shoot him and then ground check him to see if he is a good buck and be disappointed—again.

My binoculars are my favorite piece of deer-hunting equipment. I almost refuse to hunt without them and have walked farther than I care to remember back to the vehicle to fetch them on the rare occasions that I have forgotten them. Not only do binoculars make you a better hunter but a safer hunter. With binoculars you are not pointing your scoped rifle at unidentified objects. Had you rather discover that the shadowy thing slinking along the distant ridge line is not a deer but another hunter while looking through a pair of binoculars or while looking through the scope of a loaded rifle? A final note, just like the scope, buy the very best binoculars you can afford. I have never heard anyone say, "I wish I had bought those cheaper binoculars."



VLADIMIR KONJUSHENKO

Don't worry about sighting in your weapon before the season opens

I mean, it's a waste of ammo and time. After all, your gun or bow was dead-on last year, so why bother? This reasoning has saved the lives of countless numbers of deer. How many times have you heard an empty-handed hunter telling the sad story of missing a deer and they say something like, "I don't know what happened, I was on him and thought the shot was good." Then I always ask "Did you shoot your gun before the season opened?" to which they often reply, "It was dead on last year." Never trust last year's results.

For some odd reason, weapons that have been dead on for years without warning and without a "known" case can be off after a year of being in the gun safe. A couple of dollars worth of ammo is a small expense when compared to missing the deer of a lifetime. Sight your rifle, muzzleloader, bow or crossbow every year in the preseason before you go hunting.

Another thing is to practice with your weapon a few times in the apparel you will be wearing when you go hunting, especially if you'll be hunting in cold weather with a bow. My friend Fred went on a bow hunt in the Midwest during the November rut and was presented with a 30-yard shot at a 140-class whitetail buck, but there was one small problem. The cold temperatures required Fred to don heavy coveralls to stay warm, and when coupled with sitting in the stand for several hours and becoming a little stiff, he was unable to draw back his bow.

He tried with all his might two or three times and finally was able to reach full draw but only after the bruiser buck had moved off behind the tree and into an area of brush. After finally getting a shot off his arrow hit some brush and he missed the buck. Another deer whose life was spared by an unprepared hunter. A little practice in those heavy coveralls would have shown Fred that he should have lowered the draw weight of his bow. Practice with your weapon until you are confident with it under all conditions.

No need to do any scouting

You are hunting the same area you did last year so just hunt it like you did last year, right? You harvested a deer then so just repeat the process? Sometimes that works and sometimes not. Ignorance is bliss and what you don't know won't hurt you, or at least you won't know it is hurting you anyway. I know people who kill a decent buck almost every year hunting the same stand. This usually works during the pre-rut or rut while hunting a funnel area or major crossing where bucks travel through while moving from one doe area to another checking for hot does or while hunting over a food plot. It never hurts to walk a lap scouting and even hanging a trail camera or two during the late pre-rut to see what sign is around and hopefully get a picture of what is making the sign.

A perfect example is during the 2014 deer season a friend who hunts a tract of land that is also hunted by two or three other hunters. This tract is also bordered by lands that receive heavy hunting pressure.

My friend decided to do a little scouting during the season after having a less than productive season. He discovered a rub line that started several hundred yards from the food source that everyone was hunting near. There were numerous large trees rubbed hard and he backtracked the rubs to a good place to ambush the buck and hung a stand. A few days later he harvested an old heavy-horned 8-point buck that scored in the 130s. I feel certain if he had not gone on that little scouting trip that old buck would still be walking around eating in that food plot in the dark.

Don't worry about wind direction

I wouldn't worry about wind direction, just go hunting. You've got those clothes that keep you scent free, you wear rubber boots and have sprayed down with that scent eliminator too. With all that you don't have to pay attention to which way the wind is blowing, right? That's what all the commercials and ads imply don't they? I've got some bad news for you—nothing can make you scent free! All that stuff really helps but to a deer you still stink. Even if you bathe with scent-free soap, use scent-free deodorant, wash your clothes in scent-free laundry detergent and keep them sealed in bags, and spray down with scent eliminator, you still are generating scent. If nothing else your breath is spreading human scent as you breathe.

Have you ever watched one of those deer hunting shows where the guy is wearing all the scent suppression clothing and took every precaution possible and still gets busted? There is no substitute for having the wind in your favor. I know hunters who take no special precautions as far as scent control is concerned but are very picky about hunting in the right wind conditions and score regularly on nice bucks. You need multiple stand locations for different wind directions and only hunt them when the wind is right. Just remember, for deer hunters, happiness is the wind in your face!

Don't take into consideration how you'll get in and out of your stand

You have found a great place to kill that big buck, an area full of signs such as rubs and scrapes, and you hang a stand, taking into account the prevailing wind. You hunt that place many times but never catch a glimpse of the big guy making the sign and before long there doesn't seem to be any new sign being made and deer sightings in general begin to dwindle. Puzzling, isn't? So you move to the stand you have overlooking a food plot or crop field and after a week or so there is still deer sign but your daylight deer sightings drop to near zero. Sound familiar? Wonder why such things happen? Usually it is your approach and exit from your stand. Every time you enter and exit your stand you leave scent and if deer are nearby, you usually spook them. This especially is true when hunting over or near food sources. If you are not careful the deer will pattern you quicker than you can pattern them. Always try to choose your stand locations with an entrance and exit plan that will allow you to get in and out without being detected by deer.

Only hunt when conditions seem perfect

There is no need to hunt when the weather is too warm, or it's really windy or any other time when conditions aren't prime. You will just be wasting your time. If you hunt like you should and don't sabotage yourself by hunting the wrong wind direction and don't spook deer as you leave your stand, every minute you spend in the stand is upping your odds you will encounter a nice buck. I know when conditions are not what we would usually consider good, such as rainy, windy or unusually warm days your odds are not as good, but every year, a few lucky (or smart) hunters harvest trophy bucks during such conditions. Deer are always somewhere and occasionally they are out during times that are less than ideal, especially during the rut. One thing for sure, you will never harvest a deer while sitting at home. Persistence is a virtue. Every moment you are in the woods increases your odds of crossing paths with a good buck.

Don't be that guy

These are some rules that over the years I have learned NOT to follow in order to achieve success, and I'm still learning and unlearning things every year. Now if you do follow all these rules, don't fret, you could still harvest a nice buck by just pure luck, somebody will do so every season but your odds are going to be pretty slim. Somebody wins the lottery almost every time there's a drawing, but odds are it won't be you. A favorite saying of mine is that the definition of crazy is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different outcome. If your deer hunting results have been less than stellar, change it up and starting with the basics is a great place to start. So don't be that guy relying on luck—make your own luck by preparation, practice and planning. ◆

Marty Shaffner is a longtime contributor to WINC *and a fishing guide in northwestern North Carolina.*

A traditionally carved Core Sound style ruddy duck created by guild member Jerry Talton. He uses only hand tools including a hatchet to rough out the shape.

KEITH HENDRICKSON

Preserving a Waterfowl Tradition

WRITTEN BY KEITH HENDRICKSON

Since 1987 the Core Sound Decoy Carvers Guild looks to the past, but embraces both the present and future of carving

KEITH HENDRICKSON

CORE SOUND DECOY CARVERS GUILD

Left: Jamie Hand teaches a hatchet carving class at the guild. Top: Carver Curt Salter, one of the original guild members, passed in 2013.

The class description said to bring your own knives and hatchet. Obviously this wasn't going to be just any ordinary class at any ordinary school. I had signed up to take a traditional decoy carving class at the Core Sound Decoy Carvers Guild. What used to be a boat dealership located just before the bridge leading onto Harkers Island is now the Guild's meeting hall, workshop, and classroom. And what a classroom it is. The main room in the building is lined with memorabilia commemorating the history of the guild and decoy competitions of the past. Complete with a paint room and workshop for all the heavier wood working tools, the building is a dream to any carving or collectors guild.

An idea that turned a dream into reality; that is how the Core Sound Decoy Carvers Guild got its start. While talking about the history of the Core Sound-style decoy, current guild board member Jerry Talton, suggests, "It sometimes helps to know where you have been, to know where you are going." That statement holds true for this carving guild and even the history of decoy carving along the coast of North Carolina, dating back well into the 1800s. Decoy carving back then was a way of life for many, and decoys were considered to be nothing more than a tool needed for hunting waterfowl. The craft was handed down from generation to generation for many coastal families that made their living on the water.

Coming from a long line of decoy carvers and boat builders, Wayne Davis and David Lawrence were both natives of Harkers Island and spent as much time as they could carving decoys, hunting and fishing. They often traveled into Virginia to attend decoy shows around Virginia Beach and Chincoteague, and on down into Currituck. Carvers at Chincoteague had their own carving guild so the two began wondering if there would be enough interest to start a Harkers Island guild, pulling from the many Core Sound carvers back in their own state.

On Aug. 11, 1987, Davis decided to celebrate his birthday by having the seven known carvers on Harkers Island come to his house where they had their first official guild meeting. He, David Lawrence, Gregory Lupton, Curt Salter, Norman Hancock, Carl Huff and James Gordon Salter enjoyed hot

A carver starts to shape a rough-cut decoy blank.

MELISSA McGAW/NCWRC

clam stew made by Davis' wife and settled on naming their group the Core Sound Decoy Carvers Guild. Those seven agreed to seek out and invite other area carvers they knew of, and they voted in Wayne Davis as president, Gregory Lupton as vice president and David Lawrence as secretary-treasurer of their newly formed group. Before the next meeting in September, they called in two additional local carvers, Roy Willis and Gerald Davis, which increased the number of the original board of directors to nine.

At that September meeting, around 30 carvers showed up. For their first year, the guild met in the library of the Harkers Island Elementary School. During their meetings, they would show home movies, discuss carving and also do a little carving. Their membership began to grow, and they started talking about holding their own competition and carving festival since North Carolina didn't have one. Most of the waterfowl shows were being held in the spring after hunting season ended. Since these guys were all serious carvers, they wanted to be able to sell their goods, so they decided to hold their show early in December, before the Christmas season swung down. Eventually they decided the first full weekend in December would be the date of their annual show.

Since there was no way they could plan and execute a show in just two months, the first Core Sound Decoy Festival was planned for Dec. 3–4, 1988. Now the festival is going into its 27th year and has grown to the point that it takes the entire elementary school to

CORE SOUND DECOY CARVERS GUILD

Five of the original guild founding members are shown here. L–R: Carl Huff, Norman Hancock, Curt Salter, Wayne Davis and Gregory Lupton.

host it. The festival has many attractions that include antique decoy exhibits, retriever demonstrations, competitions including duck calling, loon calling, head whittling, and a live and silent auction. There's always delicious food offered by the school staff and volunteers (including their famous clam chowder and banana pudding), and plenty of shopping opportunities from the many vendors who fill all of the school's classrooms and gymnasium each year.

As the guild developed, the members continued to meet at the local elementary school library but eventually outgrew that room and had to move their meetings to the lunch room. It was decided that they also needed to consider developing a museum that celebrated the region's waterfowl heritage, so several members began researching that idea. Before long they selected a separate board for the museum, and through initial grants and donations, the museum was able to move into a building that was formerly a doctor's office next to the school. The guild then moved its meetings over with the museum. The guild and museum continued to work closely with their programs; the guild's purpose is to promote decoy making and all who are decoy carvers, painters and collectors, wildfowl artists, wildfowl photographers, taxidermists, and anyone who has an interest in waterfowl, wildfowl art and waterfowl heritage. The museum's mission is to interpret the region's waterfowl traditions and coastal cultural heritage: "to establish a facility that will enhance the community, state and region by creating a resource which brings together the historical, cultural, artistic, environmental and educational elements needed to preserve the rich waterfowl heritage of eastern North Carolina associated with the Core Sound area."

HOW THE DECOY GUILD BEGAN...

A group of carvers got together
To try to create a wooden feather;
With a knife and a hatchet, to see if they could
Make a real bird out of a piece of wood.
A real bird they couldn't make,
But an old decoy they did create.
And when them old carvers are gone on their way,
That old decoy will be there to stay.
And if later, someone looking at that old piece of wood,
Would say, I know who carved that, he was pretty—good!
Then it would all be worth those lonely days
Knowing, although we've gone, part of us stays.

—Wayne Davis

MELISSA McGAW/NCWRC

CORE SOUND DECOY CARVERS GUILD

THE CORE SOUND DECOY CARVERS GUILD MISSION STATEMENT

- To document the history of decoy making and its development as a folk art form.
- To increase awareness and appreciation of waterfowl and the need for protection of its natural habitat.
- To provide demonstrations of traditional decoy making through workshops, classes and daily demonstrations.
- To bring to this area decoy carvers, collectors, artists, photographers and waterfowl writers from other waterfowl regions of the United States.
- To develop educational youth outreach programs.
- To provide an annual decoy festival thereby presenting a showcase of decoy carving and wildfowl related art.

MELISSA McGAW/NCWRC

A traditional Core Sound bluebill decoy carved by Wayne Davis. A close resemblance was good enough to draw waterfowl into shotgun range.

THE CORE SOUND DECOY STYLE WITH JOEY EUBANKS

Joey Eubanks comes from a family of decoy carvers in the Beaufort area. He began carving in 1990 and a year or so later joined the Core Sound Decoy Carver's Guild. His carving technique with traditional Core Sound style decoys has been refined to the point he has won many Best of Shows in the annual Core Sound Decoy Festival. When asked just what it is that makes a Core Sound style decoy different from other styles, Joey had this to say:

KEITH HENDRICKSON

Joey Eubanks

- The decoy style dates back to the early 1900s and the blocks were typically chopped out of whatever was available using a hatchet and then refined a bit using a draw knife, plane or spoke shave. The heads were carved with a knife. Little or no sanding was done since sandpaper was expensive back then.
- The predominant wood used was juniper, pine or cypress — often recycled from shipwrecks. Juniper was the preferred wood that has a unique, easy-carving grain feature giving the decoy that "old time" feel. Juniper often cracks or checks, but these cracks had little effect on the performance of this rot-resistant wood.
- The decoy looks like a decoy, not a duck. It only had to fool the birds to come in close enough for the shotgun's reach. The bodies were carved with hard side chines much like the old boats had. The backs were rounded up and the sides rounded down to a typically flat bottom.
- The heads were blocky with fairly flat cheeks and no eye channels or glass eyes. They were nailed onto the body and no carving or putty was used to blend the neck into the body. Usually a dowel, large nail or long screw was inserted through the top of the head to help keep the head from falling off when the neck cracked.
- The paint was usually mixed from whatever was available in the boat shed. The colors just needed to be close, not exact. Absolutely no feather detail was painted on; color variations from the head, backs and belly were block painted using straight lines and no blending. If wing colors were painted on, they were exaggerated in size to be more visible to the duck.
- The hardware on the decoy was again often recycled from old shipwrecks. The weight could be anything from a strip or flat piece of lead nailed to the bottom, a rail road spike, to even a cut piece of old propeller shaft. The line ties were as simple as an old large-headed nail hammered into the front of the bird to a loop of old shoe leather or canvas nailed in the bottom front of the decoy.
- Decoys were purely functional. If a head broke off another was nailed on. Carvers produced decoys by the thousands during the market gunning days, so there was no time to make a "pretty" bird. Once a block became too worn and split for use, it was often thrown into the wood stove, making the remaining old birds highly collectable.

BRENT HOOD

KEITH HENDRICKSON

KEITH HENDRICKSON

BRENT HOOD

Left: In the decoy competition, decoys are placed in a tank of water to be judged. Top: Shows the sequence of development from blank to finished decoy. Above: The decoy festival includes a live auction that uses proceeds to benefit the guild.

Through all the work the guild has conducted over the years, its mission is to safeguard and preserve the memory of those pioneers who helped define the Core Sound decoy carving heritage by offering an honest view of the past, while increasing awareness and appreciation of waterfowl, and providing demonstrations and workshops so that the decoy carving heritage will continue on to the next generation. It is their hope that "by providing a glimpse into the past, and a look at the present, the future of decoy carving may be preserved."

Holding true to the guild's mission statement, it conducts weekly carving sessions every Thursday. Members have monthly meetings and hold several major carving workshops during the year. They also organize and hold several fun decoy competitions; in May they celebrate Loon Day with an open decoy competition where the birds are floated at the Harkers Island Bridge, and in June they assist with the Kent Hood Memorial Core Sound Hunting Rig Competition that is organized and held at the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center. The guild's major International Wildfowl Carvers Association sanctioned competition is held during the Core Sound Decoy Festival. On the third Saturday of most months, the guild conducts a 'Kids Carving Program' where members work with youngsters to introduce them to carving. Some members demonstrate traditional carving techniques at many of the decoy shows and competitions all over the state.

It was one of these demonstrations that caught my attention where a couple of members were carving decoys with old carpenters' hatchets. This past June, the guild managed to talk master carver Jamie Hand, from New Jersey, into conducting a two-day workshop on hatchet-carving a traditional Jersey style black duck that I knew I had to take. The class used traditional hand tools to carve a hollow Jersey style cedar decoy from start to finish. This class gave its students a serious look at how birds were carved a hundred years ago, and increased everyone's awareness and appreciation of this art form that some will go on and teach to others.

Education through workshops, shows and demonstrations is the guild's future.

Education through workshops, shows and demonstrations is the guild's future. Carver Monte Willis said it best during one of their competitions; that "the best carver in the world can acquire all the knowledge and technique it takes to carve a perfect decoy, but that knowledge does no one any good if it is retained within just that carver. That knowledge has to be shared or it is worthless and will die with that carver when he or she is no longer with us." The guild's goals are met by having some of the best carvers in the world (and many will easily argue that they do in fact have the best in the world) that are more than willing to demonstrate and share their knowledge to anyone that is willing to listen and learn.

For more information about the Core Sound Decoy Carvers Guild, check out their website at: decoyguild.com or look them up on Facebook.

Keith Hendrickson is a conservation technician with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

Exploring the early days of fly-fishing in 19th century western North Carolina.

Speckled Beauties & HARD ROADS

Written by **Jim Wilson** | Illustrated by **Gary Palmer**

The early history of fly-fishing in North Carolina is revealed in bits and pieces, more akin to reading a box of old letters with pages missing than a continuous, chronological tale. That doesn't diminish the story, but it does make it more difficult to understand.

Most of what we today think of as the history of fly-fishing in the Mountains dates only from the 20th century. The earliest book devoted wholly to fishing in North Carolina, "Black Bass and other Fishing in North Carolina," did not appear until 1909. Written by A.V. Dockery, a Richmond County native, United States Naval Academy graduate and U.S. diplomat, the book covers most types of freshwater fishing in the state. Dockery includes only two chapters about brook trout fishing, and one of those had been published three years earlier by Louis Rhead, a well-known fishing writer and illustrator of the day, and is devoted to worm fishing techniques for brook trout.

It's easy to see why Mountain fly-fishing took so long to attract literary attention. To say that much of the region was off the beaten path would be an understatement. Western North Carolina was sparsely populated and difficult to reach. And travel was difficult once one was in the mountains. Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury had this to say in 1806 at the end of one of his journeys through the mountains: "Once more I have escaped from filth, fleas, rattlesnakes, hills, mountains, rocks, and rivers."

One exception to the isolation was the Buncombe Turnpike, which was completed in 1827 and ran from the South Carolina line to Asheville and connected farther on with the Tennessee Road. The road brought a measure of prosperity to the region, as it was used primarily for livestock, particularly thousands of hogs driven from Tennessee to Asheville. As Alex S. Caton writes: "Certainly, one of the most vivid images from Asheville's past continues to be that of herds of hogs roaming down the city's main street."

It wasn't until March of 1879 that railroads conquered the Eastern Continental Divide at Old Fort and entered Buncombe County, bringing, as Timothy N. Osment has written, "money, power, and a taste of affluence to Western North Carolina."

For many inhabitants of the Mountains, it was likely a very small taste, but Asheville blossomed and by the late 19th century was a tourist destination with such considerable hotels as the original Battery Park and the Swannanoa. (The city's population in 1880 was 2,616, but in 10 years jumped to 10,235.) But for those who wanted to fish, Asheville and its attractions were not a destination, but a jumping-off point. Wagons and horses were available for hire, and trains led from Asheville in various directions toward fishing.

Consider the 1890 journey of a contributor to *Forest and Stream* magazine from Chicago known only as "Rush:"

"I went to the city of Asheville last May, to find some place where the speckled trout could be caught in sufficient numbers to make the sport interesting. I went to the headwaters of the Big Pigeon River, 40 miles west of Asheville, and found trout in unlimited numbers. Took a train on the Murphy branch of the Western N.C.R.R., and stopped at Pigeon Valley station, 25 miles from Asheville, thence by wagon up into the mountains over 15 miles of the roughest wagon road I ever rode over, found a farmer who agreed to keep me, and the next day the former and your servant gave the 'speckled beauties' our attention."

Travel was not the only problem in fishing western North Carolina waters. Rush said that he had heard ominous reports of Mountain food when he left south Florida: "People said I would starve to death up there, because women did not know how to cook, and if they did know how they didn't have anything to cook that a civilized man could eat after it was cooked.

"It didn't take many days to find that those dire warnings were false. My appetite had not served me so well in twenty years as it was then doing," he wrote. "We did not have many dainties except trout, honey and bushels of the finest wild strawberries I ever saw. The wagon loads of blueberries and blackberries that came later I do not make special note of. There was plenty of milk, fresh-made butter daily, cream by the gallon, corn pone and hot biscuit. These articles might not be considered dainties by some . . . but they put the flesh on my lean sides and made my cheeks as rosy as a girl's."

Rush may have been typical of some of the sportsmen beginning to seek out North Carolina in considerable numbers from the North. We might assume he had been fishing in south Florida, and we know from his writing that he was familiar with fishing in Maine and northern Michigan. A number of other correspondents contributed pieces on fishing North Carolina. Some of those men were well-educated and well-heeled, and although none of them wrote books about their adventures here, this is where some of the earliest stories of our western angling history are told.

Rush wrote back-to-back pieces on North Carolina trout fishing in *Forest and Stream*, a national outdoor magazine published in New York from 1873 until 1930 when it was absorbed by *Field & Stream*. (I have tried to discover the identity of Rush, as have a number of more capable researchers, all to no avail.)

Rush wrote in the Nov. 4, 1890 issue of the magazine: "Very few Northern trout fishermen know much about the streams in western North Carolina, I think, and perhaps if I should tell of my experience in that region people would say that some of my 'yarns' were decidedly 'fishy,' I will, in consequence of that, confine this article strictly to facts."

One of Rush's trips took him to the Pigeon River and Crawford Creek. "Old man Crawford, who owns the creek, charges all who fish it 15 cents per pound for all they catch. I fished it eight times I was up there, for fish for my own use, and paid him something more than eleven dollars, and did not keep any fish that would measure less than 6 in. in length."

That means that Rush would have caught approximately 70-plus pounds of trout. What is more interesting, however, is that he was returning the smaller trout to the creek.

Rush is more along the lines of a modern angler in that he tells us what flies, or bait, he used. "When I started for the mountains I provided myself with such flies and tackle as I had been in the habit of using on the trout streams in New England and northern Michigan, but when I came to use those flies I found that those N.C. trout didn't fancy them; the result was I used a cinnamon-hackle, and baited the hook with a red worm; with that contrivance I could catch those trout until I was tired."

Two weeks later, he writes, stick bait became plentiful and he and his fellow anglers forsook the red worms and switched to stick bait on lemon hackle, having accidentally arrived at a western North Carolina truism: use any fly as long as its something yellow. And stick bait is white or light yellow. A common addition for generations to flies in the mountains, stick bait is the caddis fly nymph. Later in the year, other immature insects will serve the same purpose, including those of hornets and yellow jackets.

Although his use of natural bait on an artificial fly may not qualify as true fly-fishing, and Rush himself acknowledges that, saying it was not "scientific fly fishing." Rush, however, did use the appropriate equipment. While fishing Shining Creek, he hooked a large speckled trout that took him to the bottom of the pool. "I struck him gently, and then started for the big pool; my line fairly smoked for a moment; I gave him at least 40 yds. of line, then sank to the bottom and sulked. That little bamboo rod of mine didn't seem strong enough to bring him from the bottom; but I worked him almost twenty minutes, and at last brought him to the bank, where the water was not more than 6 in. deep, held my rod with one hand, reached down and put thumb and forefinger of the other into his mouth and gills and took him ashore. He was 17 in. in length and a beauty."

When heavy rain made Crawford's Creek unfishable, Rush, staying with a farmer named Osborn, turned his hand to fly-tying. "I had some fine Scotch hooks, tied to a hair snell, but without any fly on them; and after a breakfast of fried trout, fried pork, cornbread and milk I got one the boys about the place to catch an old white rooster that was strutting about the barnyard. I plucked some of the long fine feathers from his neck, found some lemon-colored dye about the house and dyed them. After they had been dried I took several of those little hooks and tied them with my yellow feathers, using white silk and gold tinsel for bodies and made some very fair looking flies. And they beat all the 'store' flies I ever used or saw during the three months of my visit in that region."

Not every fly-fisherman was a visitor, although magazines of the era contained brief pieces urging Northerners and fellow Southerners to visit. One such North Carolina angler was John K. Hoyt, a Washington, N.C., native who was beginning to learn the merchant trade in Mobile, Ala., when the Civil War began. After the war, Hoyt managed a store for R. H. Macy in New York, married and returned to the Candler area, where he built a 26-room mansion he named Engadine in 1885 where he produced considerable amounts of wine.

In the May 30, 1885 issue of *American Angler* magazine, Hoyt tells of having received a number of letters from "parties living north, asking for information with regard to the trout fishing in this section . . . "

Hoyt tells of the "fine sport" that can be had on both the East Fork of the Pigeon, where the trout average "about nine in length, yet one often takes them twelve inches long. ... It is no uncommon feat to take two hundred trout to the rod, between sunrise and dark."

The Cataloochee, wrote Hoyt, is another famous stream, although he warns that "as the Cataloochee country is very wild and rough, with an occasional moonshiner—always very suspicious of strangers—it would be advisable to procure a native guide."

Hoyt closed his epistle by saying, "I am a horny handed farmer, with a weakness for a fly rod, and live right here at home. And should you or any brother angler come this way, just drive in at the big gate of Engadine Farm, and while Mrs. H is getting lunch ready, we will sit on the piazza and you can tell me your latest and best fishing yarn."

Still, trout fishing in North Carolina had made so little national impact that Mary Orvis Marbury did not include a fisherman from our state in her landmark "Favorite Flies and Their Histories" of 1892, although anglers from Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia and Mississippi were included. One Kentuckian, William A. Obenchain of Bowling Green, does talk about fishing the Linville River and its tributaries and lists the following flies as his favorites: Coachman, Royal Coachman, Professor, Gray Drake, Brown Hackle, Black Hackle, March Brown and Chantrey. All of these wet flies are still somewhat familiar with the exception of the Chantrey, which is a very old fly indeed. Scotland's John Kirkbride described it in "The Northern Angler" of 1837 as being similar to the Governor, except that "it must be tipt at the tail with gold-coloured silk, and ribbed with fine silver thread or plait."

"EVERY LITTLE MOVE IN DRAWING BACK, AS THE FLIES FLOAT DOWN, GIVES THEM THE APPEARANCE OF A LIVE WORM TRYING TO GET OUT OF THE WATER."

The most intriguing mention of flies used for fishing North Carolina waters in Marbury's book came from J. H. Stewart of Jackson, Miss., in correspondence of 1887. He sent Marbury two specimens of what he called "North Carolina Indian Flies," reversed hackle flies "made by cutting narrow strips of deerskin with the hair left on, wrapped around the hook a few times, and well tied at each end. . . .

"The effect of this reverse method, i.e., tying the hair to point instead of towards the bend of the hook, is very perceptible in swift water. Every little move in drawing back, as the flies float down, gives them the appearance of a live worm trying to get out of the water."

We also find some tales of fishing and tantalizing descriptions of flies in "The Heart of the Alleghanies," a book on the people and land of western North Carolina. Included in the nearly 400-page volume is a chapter on fishing to be had in a number of rivers and streams, including the Toe, Swannanoa, Cane, Pigeon and "Cataluche."

The advice Ziegler and Grosscup give for the angler visiting North Carolina is one approach and might even be typical of the day, but is different from Rush's just seven years later.

"As far as rods are concerned, a slender birch cut from the bank of the stream will answer every purpose of a ringed and jointed rod; for reels with lines of fifty or more yards can not be used with any advantage. A silk or hair line, as long as the pole, is the length required. . . . As for artifical flies, have a supply with you, and use the one nearest like the one in season . . . It makes a great difference in the choice of your flies whether the stream is crystal in clearness, or is slightly discolored by a recent rain; and whether you have ventured out before breakfast, or the day is drawing to a close. It would be strange if at the later hour a white or yellow fly, like those dropping on the surface of the stream, could not be used with pleasing returns."

The authors' fly selection, obviously, may be seen as an early nod to matching the hatch.

Ziegler and Grosscup relate two interesting stories of specific flies, neither of which are named. The first, used most successfully by a "mountaineer," was a "green-winged, yellow-bodied artifical fly with a stick-bait worm strung on the hook."

The second mention is even more intriguing because it harkens back to the very earliest history of fly-fishing. While fishing the Cataloochee in June of 1879, the authors encountered a young boy with a long stringer of trout, approximately 100, for sale for 75 cents.

"The young angler was a bright-looking little fellow, with the clearest of complexions, ruddy cheeks and dark hair. He was barefooted and wore a straw hat, homespun pantaloons, jacket, and tattered shirt; and, as we stood with him in the road, he regaled us as follows:

'Did you catch all those trout yourself? [he] was asked.

'Yes, sir; an' all ov 'em sence dinner. I heerd you'uns war comin' and I knowed some o' you all cudn't ketch trouts by yourselfs, so I reckoned on arnin' a little by fetchin' in a string.'

'What did you catch them with?'

"He exhibited a hair line and a fly made of a crooked pin, wound with a small piece of red flannel and black and white feather. 'I hid the pole up yander,' he continued, pointing behind him."

Consider then the earliest known mention of fishing with an artifical fly, that coming from the Roman writer Aelian in the second century A. D. Aelian tells us of the "Macedonian way of catching fish." It is fairly clear to historians that the fish Aelian is talking about are trout, but the river—the Astraeus—and the insect he discusses—the Hippouros—are debated still.

Aelian describes the fly and the method as such: "They fasten red [crimson wool] around a hook, and fix onto the wool two feathers

which grow under a cock's wattles, and which in colour are like wax. Their rod is six feet long, and their line is the same length."

Amazingly, nearly 1700 years, Aelian could be describing both the fly and the gear—as described by Zeigler and Grosscup—used by that lad in the North Carolina mountains to catch trout.

Another story of interest in "Heart of the Alleghanies" is a very early tale of trout fishing in North Carolina, dating from 1839. The angler was Silas McDowell, a well-known farmer, court clerk, tailor and apple grower in Macon County who had a farm along the Cullasaja River. His story, say Ziegler and Grosscup is illustrative of "what the primitive angler" encountered.

"One bright morning, he [McDowell] with two young companions, started up the Cullasaja. As a matter of course, they had excellent sport, and met with no adventure, until, in the ravines of Lamb mountain, a magnificent, antlered buck, startled by their sudden appearance, leaped up from behind a cliff and started up the stream. There was no outlet for him on either side, for the walls of the gorge are perpendicular. A short distance ahead, a cliff, over which the water tumbled, would stop his career. They had no guns with them, and, although the game was securely bagged, their only way to kill him was with stones. They pushed on pelting him with these. At length, maddened with the stoning, the old stag turned and rushed by them, breaking the narrator's fishing rod as he passed. Just then he fell between two large boulders, and one of the young men, springing on the animal's back, soon dispatched him with his knife. They sank the carcass in the cold, rushing water; fished until noon, catching several hundred trout, and then returned home to send two servants with a pack-horse after the game."

There are two things to ponder in this short story. One is the authors' use of the word "sport" in describing McDowell's outing. Although the trout certainly would have been eaten, it seems that at least on this trip McDowell was not out simply to fill the larder; he was relaxing also. The other is the notation that the deer broke McDowell's "rod" in rushing past. If McDowell had cut a "slender birch" from the side of the river would he have even bothered mentioning that the deer broke it? One could safely argue that McDowell must have been using a real fishing rod that he had acquired or built himself, the loss of which was worthy of note.

Was McDowell engaged in some form of fly-fishing? It would seem possible, and perhaps likely. Having knowledge of fly-fishing would have been more than likely for McDowell. He had lived in Charleston, S.C., a major cultural center of the South. He later moved to Asheville just prior to the completion of the Buncombe Turnpike, which carried not only livestock, but people and ideas into western North Carolina. As a farmer, apple grower and educated man, McDowell probably read agricultural magazines of the period, such as *The American Farmer* or *Farmer's*, both of which contained sporting pieces among their pages. Too, fly-fishing gear had been advertised in American periodicals since Colonial days. Buying or making a fly rod—dogwood was once a common material for such rods—would not have been beyond his means.

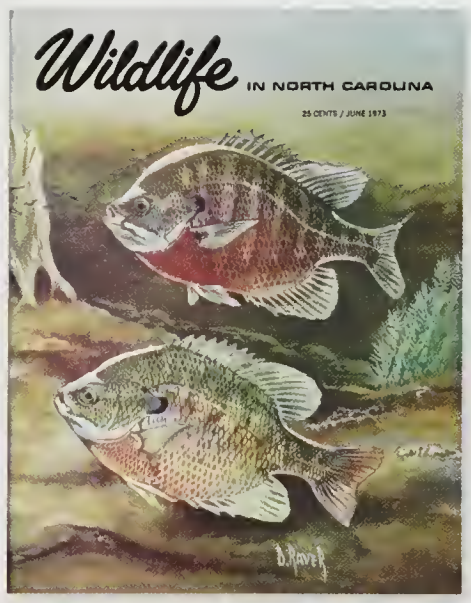
But even more to the point, if McDowell was fly-fishing, then there must have been a background of others having done so previously. It is unlikely that he sprang *sui generis* from the waters of the Cullasaja. Although travel in the mountains could be difficult, as Bishop Asbury testifies, it certainly had been for a long time. If people and ideas flowed into the mountains, then they also flowed out, perhaps especially stories of beautiful, cold streams filled with rising trout waiting for some intrepid fisherman. ◆

Jim Wilson is the recently retired editor of Wildlife in North Carolina. *He may be reached at jimlw3@icloud.com.*

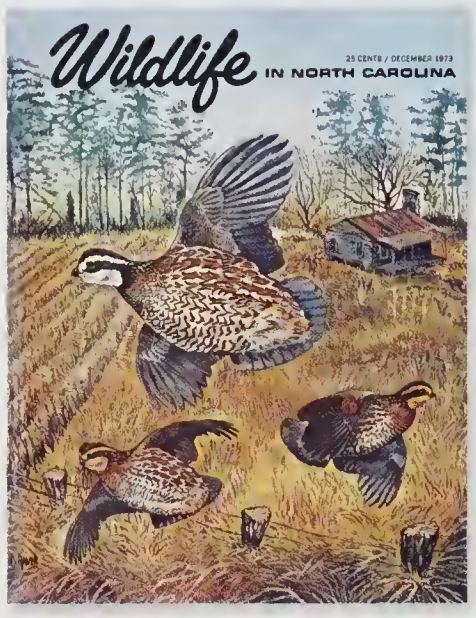
MELISSA McGAW/NCWRC

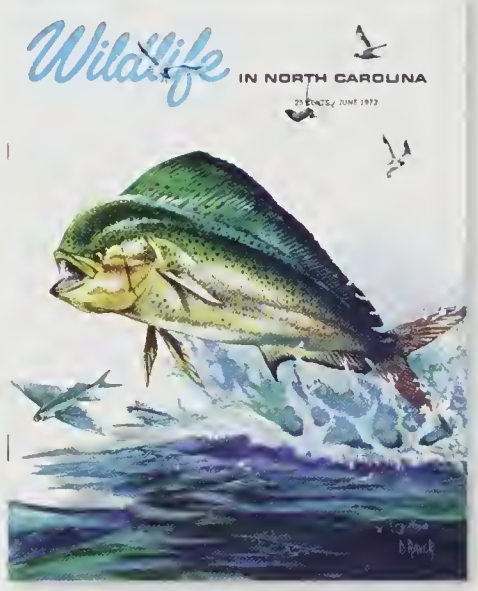
Duane Raver
NORTH CAROLINA'S *Wildlife* ARTIST

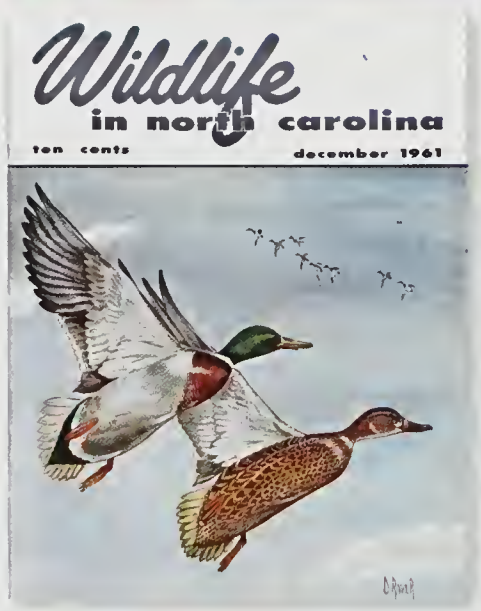
Written by Jim Wilson

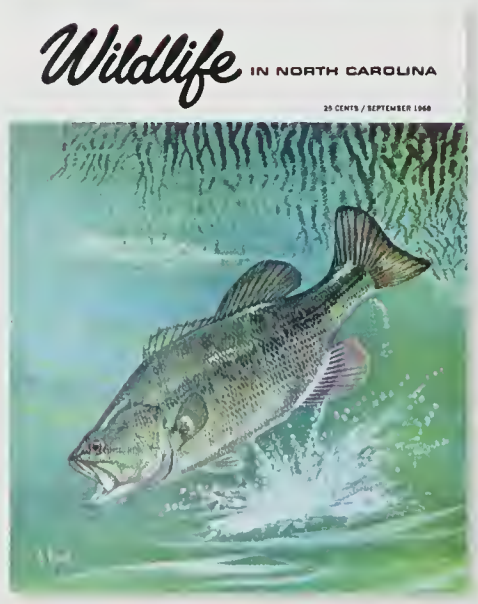


It is not unusual that, apropos to nothing, I'll receive a phone call, an email or a letter from someone who wants to talk about Duane Raver. Usually it's just to say how much happiness one of his paintings has brought them through the years. There was a generation or so who grew up reading *Wildlife in North Carolina* with the Raver covers. They were beautiful representations of our state's wildlife, and although Duane is perhaps best known for his fish paintings and illustrations, for me, no one has ever painted quail better. His bobwhite covers evoke everything I cherish about my childhood in rural Granville County. I suspect Duane touches the same chord in thousands of other people, and that is one reason why he is so revered.



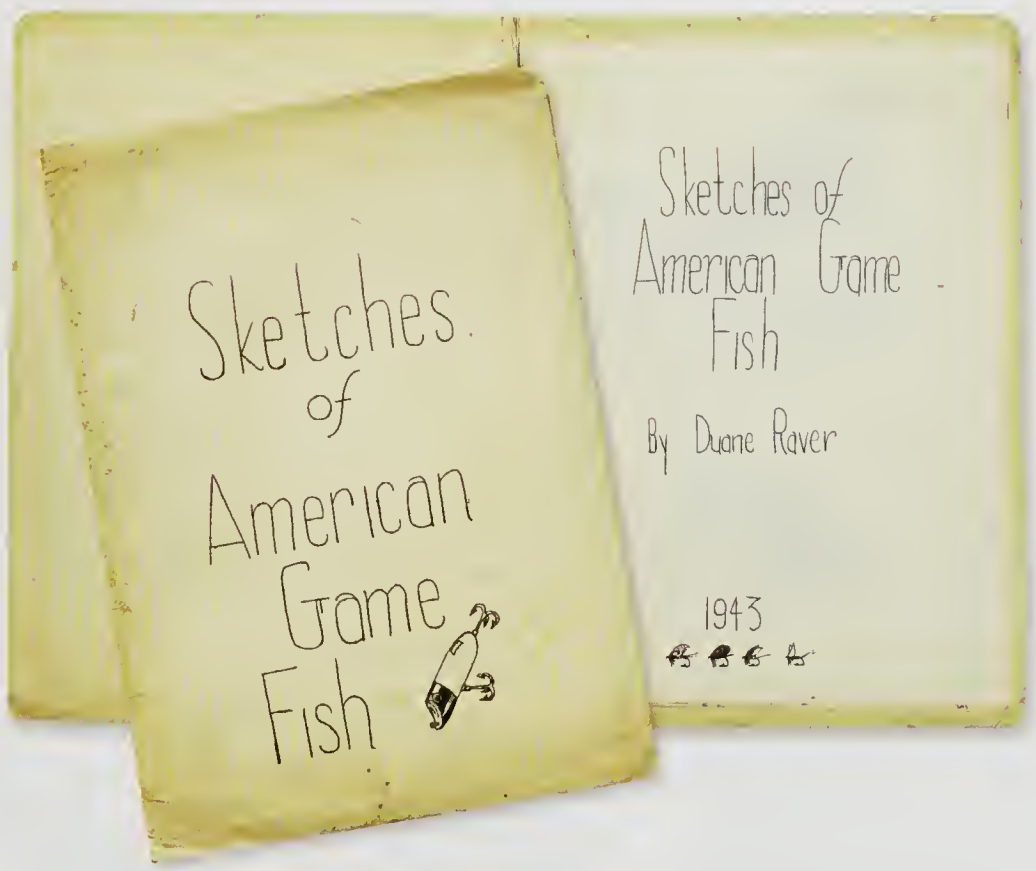




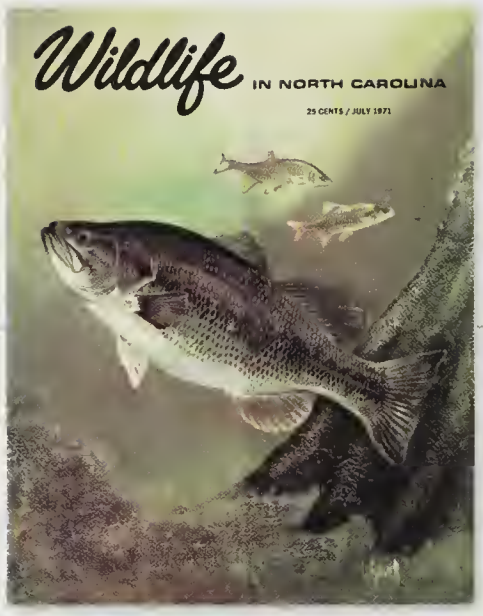


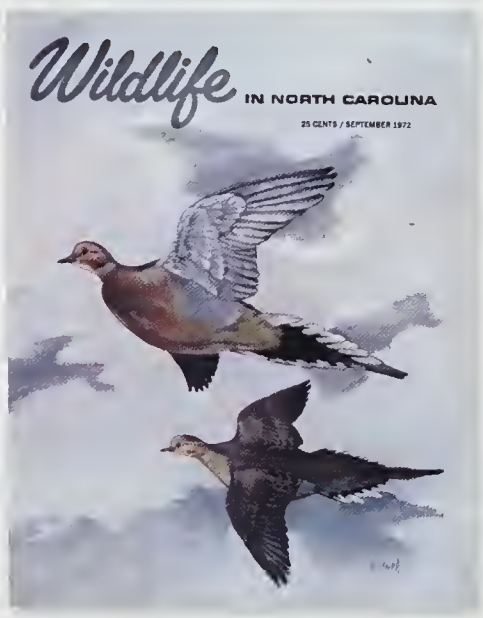
A fellow commission employee tells the story of meeting Duane when he was still editor of this magazine. Duane was sitting at a table, painting. Periodically he would reach into a bucket at his feet and pull out a fish, a black crappie, examine it, then return to painting that same fish. As a biologist, Duane wants his fish portraits anatomically correct. Chances are if you search for a fish species online, a Raver image is among those you'll find. He's just that good.

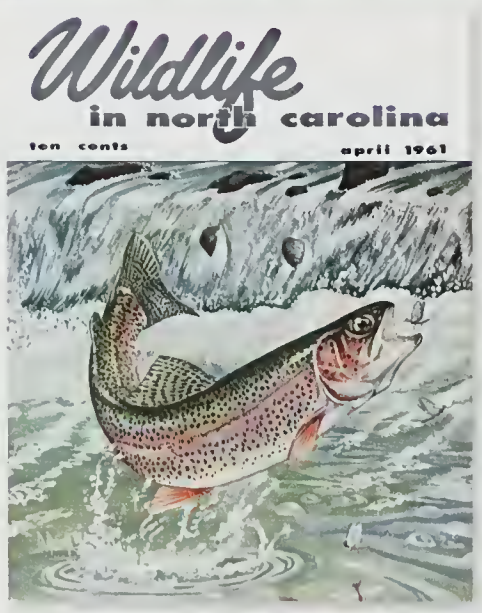
Beyond his artistic talents, Duane Raver is simply one of those people you don't meet very often—intelligent, kind, helpful, self-effacing. There aren't many guys around like Duane, and there seem to be fewer and fewer as the days go by.



Opposite: Raver's art graced the cover of *Wildlife in North Carolina* on numerous occasions. From top: December, 1973; June, 1972; December, 1961 and September, 1968. Top: This rough-cut oak slab features three Northern bobwhite quail in flight. Right: Raver's sketchbook from when he was 16 years old.

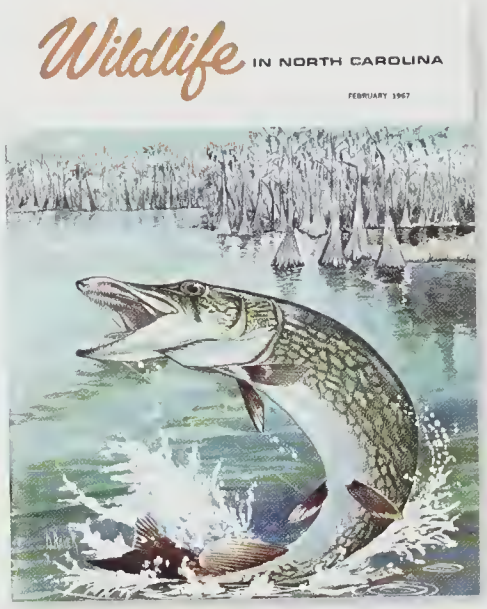


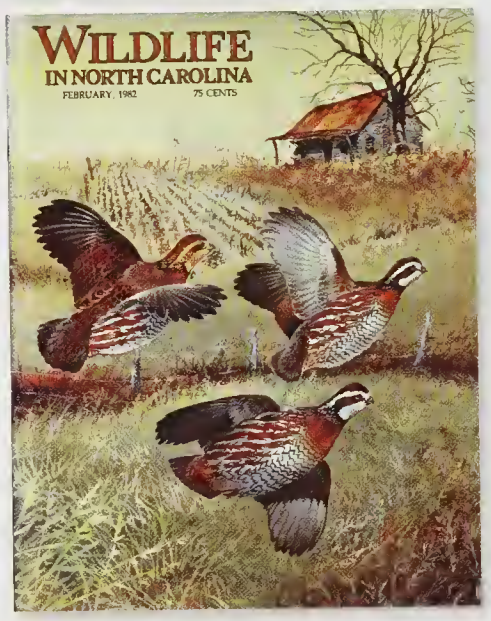


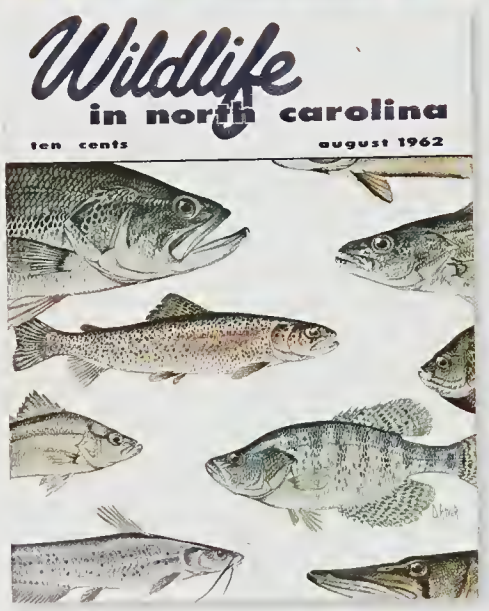


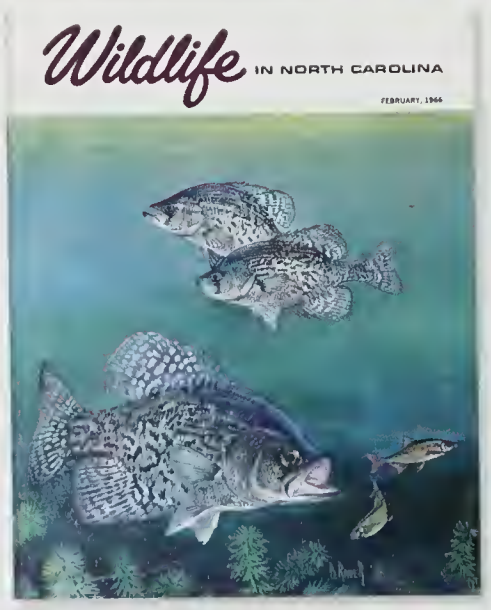
Left: These covers (from top) were featured on July, 1971; February, 1970; September, 1972 and April, 1961. Above and right shows the creative sequence in the creation of a largemouth bass throwing a jig-and-spinner bait.

D. RAVER









Left: These Raver covers are dated February, 1967; February, 1982: August, 1962 and February, 1966. Above: Raver's work adorns other surfaces such as wood boat paddles. Right: Some examples of Raver's work include yellow bullhead, brown bullhead, lake chub-sucker, redhorse sucker and longnose gar.

D. RAVER

New Homes on the RANGE

CHAKRIT THONGWATTANA

MIKE ZLOTNICKI/NCWRC

Top: Some ranges, like the Lentz range in Ellerbe, feature field or 3D archery. The pistol range at Caswell is 25-yards deep and covered from the elements. Right: A gunner fires at a clay at the 5-stand sporting clay range at Ellerbe.

MELISSA McGAW/NCWRC

Shooters are finding new places to shoot on game lands

WRITTEN BY MIKE ZLOTNICKI

DEBORAH COPELAND IS ASKED A QUESTION AND THEN GIVES A COMMAND. **"RANGE IS GOING COLD!"** SHE SAYS, **"GUNS DOWN AND ACTIONS OPEN!"**

Within a minute the marksman who asked to replace a target is walking down range to hang new paper. It's a drill Copeland will repeat many times a day at the Flintlock Valley Shooting Range in Uwharrie National Forest near Troy.

Flintlock Valley is a partnership between the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). It was renovated by the commission and reopened in 2014. After renovation, the Forest Service took note of the success and asked if the commission would partner with them on renovations to four ranges in the western part of the state.

Cold Mountain Shooting Range opened in 2006, and there was a lull until 2012, when the commission assumed management and upgraded the Lentz Range into the John Lentz Hunter Education Complex. Six more ranges are either in the planning stage or nearing completion stage as you read this.

MELISSA McGAW/NCWRC

FILLING A NEED The commission's shooting range program began as an agency initiative, backed by Executive Director Gordon Myers and the 19 wildlife commissioners, after the agency realized that its Pittman-Robertson funds would temporarily increase due to the rise in collections from excise taxes on firearms and ammunition. "Director Myers has asked staff to build one of the best range programs in the nation, and we are well on our way to doing that," said Erik Christofferson, a deputy director with the commission.

"North Carolina's outdoor heritage is important to our quality of life and economic vitality," Myers said. "The Wildlife Resources Commission is ensuring that people across the state have a safe and readily available public access infrastructure that supports our hunting and shooting sports heritage."

Flintlock was an easy choice to kick off the initiative. The range was in existence, but had not been operational for some time. "We contacted the USFS with ideas for this project and to get it reopened," said Christofferson. "The USFS has realized the benefits of partnership with us and has asked us to partner with them on several other sites, which ensures these facilities will stay open and available for public use." The commission and USFS signed a formal agreement on the shooting ranges in September.

Pittman-Robertson funds and the interest from the Wildlife Endowment Fund are paying for the ranges across the state. PR funds are 10-percent excise taxes manufacturers pay on firearms, ammunition and archery equipment before it's sold at retail.

Christofferson said the National Rifle Association has been a strong supporter of range construction, with grants totaling about $100,000 earmarked for the facilities. In fact, the commission uses the NRA Range Source Book as a source for range construction and protocol.

The development of the shooting range program also helps eliminate the problem of people using the commission's game lands for target practice, which had produced both safety and litter issues, Christofferson said.

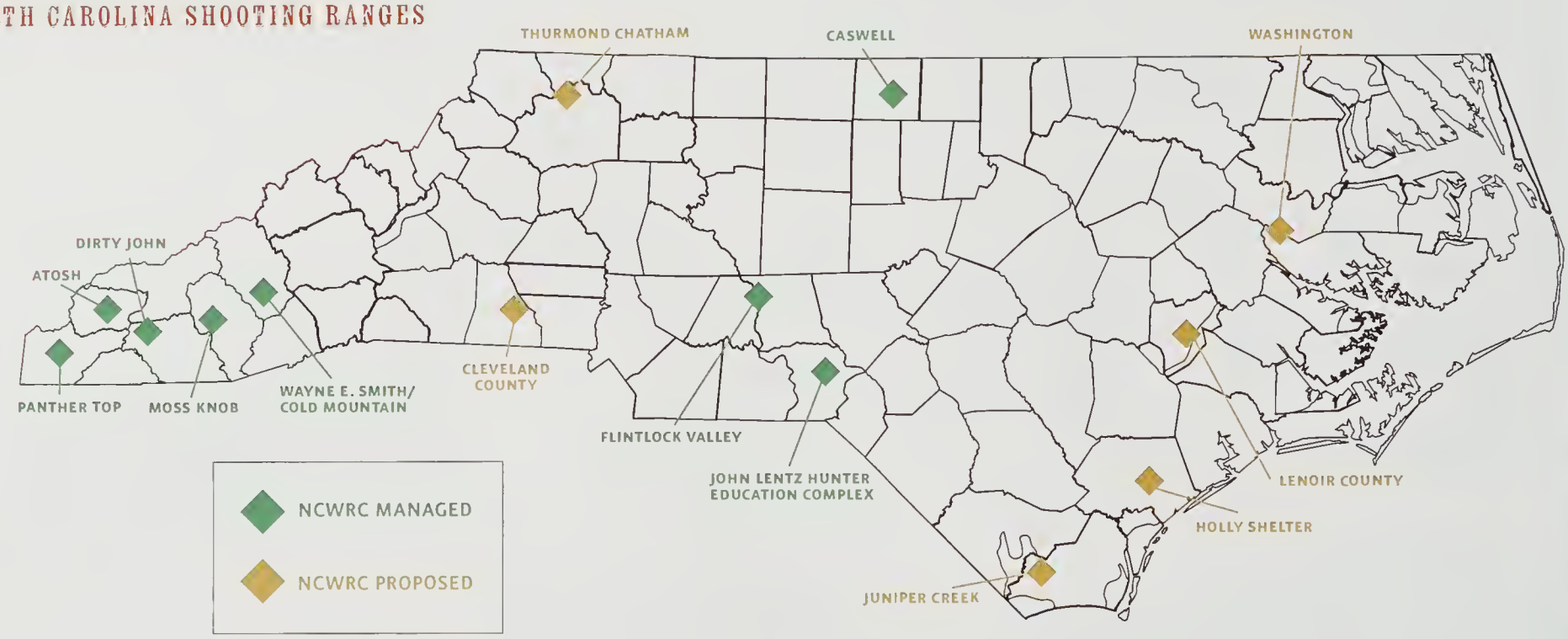
Litter at shooting sites just doesn't mean paper and other refuse. It also means metals—lead, brass and aluminum—as well as plastic hulls and wads.

Joseph Little, managing director at Little Environments, does contract work with the commission regarding environmental assessments and environmental stewardship plans.

"We did the preliminary environmental assessment for the nominated sites," he said. "Most of the sites are fairly simple, and we were able to take a proactive approach to them. We need to manage lead, brass, waddings and human interaction with the local flora and fauna."

"With dedicated shooting sites, it means that lead will be managed and not affect the environment. Shooting sites with no designated plan means the public is shooting trees, signs and leaving brass, boxes and trash. Two guys can go a hundred rounds each and leave several pounds of lead."

NORTH CAROLINA SHOOTING RANGES



"These are plans we enjoy doing," said Little, who holds a Lifetime Sportsman's License. "They're good for the community. Shooting ranges on game lands make the public aware of environmental stewardship."

QUICK VISITS Flintlock lies on 5 acres at the end of a gravel road that's more trail than thoroughfare. The speed limit is 25 mph, which is pretty optimistic. But that doesn't keep shooters from using the facility.

"We have all walks of life, ranging from experts to beginner," said Copeland last summer. "Last week I had a lot of grandfathers teaching grandsons to shoot. We get families out here. It's nothing on a Saturday to have a family of five or six out and all of them be involved."

MELISSA McGAW/NCWRC

Shooting ranges on game lands also do something else; they make game lands safer...

At Flintlock there are seven rifle stations (100 yards) and four pistol stations (25 yard). They are averaging about 18 shooters a day, said Copeland, whose father was a serviceman who taught her to shoot at age 8.

"We're also trying to make the range more family-friendly," said Copeland of the future. "We're going to get picnic tables and put those in safe places. We're also working on some programs for the youth, and I would like to see some competitions started up. I would like to see hunter safety classes out here."

One of the shooters, Steve Scarboro of Concord, brought two of his friend's sons with him. "I come once every two months," he said. "I love it, it's beautiful. It's got everything you need. I shot the .30-30 and the .223 today and .22 rifles with the boys, and my black-powder rifle."

Travel distance doesn't seem much of a deterrent. Copeland said most of her patrons come from an hour and a half away.

"I have people from as far away as Goldsboro coming in on a regular basis. A lot of people come from the Raleigh area, Winston-Salem and the Charlotte area. Ninety-five percent of my people come from an hour and a half away."

The Caswell Shooting Range is much like Flintlock—rifle and pistol only—and is not staffed when open Thursday to Sunday. That's not a problem to Richard Hanes and his wife Laura of Timberlake, who heard about the range through word of mouth.

"Some friends who live in Caswell County told us about this place, and we came to check it out," said Hanes after shooting his 9mm Makarov pistol. "I came out here one Sunday afternoon and drove up and said 'is there a family day, a picnic'? I saw all these people—moms and dads up on the line—family groups, kids back here. It was like a Sunday outing, something from the 1890s. It was like I went to a church picnic and a shooting match broke out."

Laura had brought a .22 Ruger revolver and a .38 revolver to practice with, and Hanes had two 9mm autoloaders and an M1 carbine for the rifle range. Hanes said range safety protocol has been easy with relative strangers communicating "hot" and "cold" for target access and just keeping in constant contact. He said the range fills a need with many shooters.

"There are enough private ranges, but they've gotten expensive and if you're not a member your hours are limited. This is a real public service. Here it's controlled, it's safe and it's a great use of taxpayers' money."

Again, in this case, the "taxpayer's money" is in the form of excise taxes from gun and ammunition purchases.

The John Lentz Hunter Education Complex in Ellerbe is a different animal than the Flintlock and Caswell sites. It has rifle and pistol ranges, but also boasts skeet, trap and five-stand sporting clays for shotgunners, and field archery and 3D archery for the stick-and-string types. Grayson McQueen is the range safety officer on site, and grew-up helping his grandfather work the site as a volunteer. Today the site has a clubhouse, plumbing, grills and a kitchen. And people are starting to discover it.

"On a really busy full Saturday I can see maybe 50–60 people," he said. "Most of them are pistol and rifle shooters. My shotgun

regulars are mostly retired military guys, and a group of realtors from Fayetteville and Southern Pines who come out."

Youth groups are common at the facility, and one summer morning Bruce Ledford of Sanford and some other leaders had six 4-H archers practicing on the field archery course. Twenty targets were hung 25 yards from the archers as Ledford spoke about the facility.

"I think it's really topflight," he said, resting under a shelter. "It's really handy. You've got the different ranges with the proper safety berms."

Mike Meginess of Rockingham, a retired firefighter, was resting in the clubhouse before heading to the rifle range to shoot. He said, "I came when the 4-H ran it. Then I joined the Sandhills Rod & Gun Club. Then I found out that Wildlife had taken it over and were going to reopen it. I retired in August 2014 and I've pretty much been a regular since then. It's a pretty area, secluded. I like to shoot rifle and pistol, mostly. My wife, Fay, loves it."

Part of the appeal of Lentz—and all of the other ranges—is the cost, or, lack thereof. The most expensive daily fees are $3 for unlimited pistol and rifle and at Lentz, $3 for a round of 25 clays.

ON THE DRAWING BOARD As you read this the commission has two ranges either on-line or coming on-line soon. Holly Shelter in Pender County should be ready in early 2016, and the Cleveland County range, an 88-acre facility near Cherryville that will have a 250-yard rifle range, five 50-yard pistol ranges (two that will double as skeet and trap ranges), a 20-station 3D archery course, rest rooms, a concession stand, a classroom and training facilities, all being Americans with Disabilities Act compliant. The County of Cleveland will partner in the facility. Partnerships are key to the growth of ranges.

"We ask our partners to staff the facilities and allow them to charge a nominal user fee," Christofferson said. "Staffing of a facility ensures safe operations and allows us to incorporate shotgun courses and 3D archery ranges. The fees cover staff time and maintenance of the facility, which makes it a no-cost project for our partners, and ranges are certainly an economic boost for the region."

Shooting ranges on game lands also do something else; they make game lands safer for hunters, hikers, birdwatchers, mountain bikers, equine and others who may use the properties year-round.

"We understand that target shooting and firearms are part of our heritage," Christofferson said. "Building state-of-the-art facilities helps us direct target shooting to a safe location and ensures that all members of the public will have a place to sight their guns in and practice."

MIKE ZLOTNICKI/NCWRC

MAKING TARGET PRACTICE SAFE AND SOUND

Shooting tubes are not new to shooting ranges, but they are new to the commission ranges.

"The tubes came about when deputy director Erik Christofferson called me and said there was a need to come up with our own style of shooting tube," said Sam Seamster, who manages the Wildlife Inmate Services program (WISe) at the Dan River Prison Work Farm in Yanceyville.

"We already had the one, and it was going to be a significant cost at $4,000, so he asked me if I could come up with something that could be as good if not better," said Seamster.

Seamster ended up with three prototypes to test.

The one everyone settled on has an 8-foot long wood frame box which is wrapped in sheet metal. The inside wall is lined with Quietfiber sound-reducing panels to absorb vibration, and a layer of Acoustiblok panel which also muffles the gunshot.

The results are impressive. During testing a .30 – 06 rifle was measured in an open shelter at 106.1 decibels. When using the shooting tube, underneath the shelter, it was 101.1.

At two-tenths of a mile, without the shooting tube it's 57.2, and with the tube it's 53.3, and that's on par with the volume of standard human conversation.

But it's not all about the sound dampening. The tubes also "lower the horizon" and prevent bullets from flying over the safety berm.

Kyle Briggs, chief of Land and Water Access at the commission, said, "We're going to be looking at installing these at every site that we have," he said. "Obviously, it's providing a significant drop in decibels, so any noise reduction is beneficial to neighbors but also to folks shooting. They certainly limit the horizon, which severely limits the opportunity for a shoot-over of the berm. In producing our own, we're saving close to 75 percent of the price of commercially-made models."

Mike Zlotnicki is the associate editor of Wildlife in North Carolina. *He may be reached at mike.zlotnicki@ncwildlife.org or 919-707-0175.*

CELEBRATING the Common One

Gray squirrels not only grace the table, but hunting them provides novices with valuable lessons.

When I was 33 years old in 1985, I decided that I would finally act on a long-held desire to try hunting in general and squirrels in particular. Coming from a non-hunting family and growing up in suburbia, I had no idea how to act on this desire. Nevertheless, I borrowed a .22 rifle from my father, and headed for a 30-acre rural parcel that I had bought the year before in hopes of one day hunting there.

Written by Bruce Ingram

IRINAK

On that initial outing, I shot at — and missed — several gray squirrels. It never occurred to me that I might need to pattern the gun (and I wouldn't have known how to anyway) until I called a veteran hunter and told him of my miseries. When I did set up a patterning board in my backyard at a distance of 30 yards, I found that I couldn't hit the bull's-eye or even the target itself. My aim did not improve when I set the target at 20 yards — or even at 10 yards.

I once again called the veteran hunter who agreed to come to my house, examined the .22, noted the bent iron sights and rusty barrel, and commented that a projectile fired from that gun "had no chance to hit the broad side of a barn." The gentleman kindly agreed to take me hunting on my 30-acre property and loaned me his .410 shotgun. The man even spent time showing me the basics and safety aspects of shooting and conducted a practice session.

On that excursion, we spied our first silvertail about 20 minutes into the outing. My mentor showed me how to still hunt toward the animal, positioned me at the foot of the mockernut hickory where the squirrel was feeding, and instructed me to "wait for a clear shot."

When I fired the scattergun and the squirrel tumbled down onto the forest floor, I experienced an indescribable joy.

In the decades since, I have come to spend the vast majority of my time afield pursuing deer and turkeys, but every autumn and winter I also still very much enjoy going out behind my wife Elaine's and my house on our 38 acres and chasing after the common gray squirrel. Unfortunately today, few hunters — both young and old — seek squirrels. Indeed, I see fewer and fewer people pursuing squirrels, even my students (I'm a high school English teacher) who hunt just want to go after deer, which is fine of course, but is also an opportunity missed.

For the common squirrel can teach an uncommon amount of woods wisdom not only to us veteran hunters, but also to those kids and adults who are new to hunting. Guy and Judy Gardner of Fuquay-Varina are officers in the Cape Fear River Branch of the Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA). The Gardners and fellow branch members frequently conduct outdoors related outreach programs.

"Why would anyone want to hunt squirrels when there are deer everywhere?" said Judy. "We get this question a lot. It's because there is no better way to connect with the outdoors, develop good observation skills and learn that patience can be rewarded than hunting for squirrels.

"In the fast-paced electronic world we live in today, many people have forgotten and many others

SQUIRREL casserole

A favorite squirrel recipe

I have a confession that is almost heresy in the South. I don't like fried squirrel, and I don't care for gravy either. However, this is how my wife Elaine cooks squirrels and it's delicious, too.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2-3 squirrels
- 1 can cream of mushroom or cream of celery soup
- 1 yellow onion cut into fourths
- 2 to 3 carrots, sliced
- 2 white potatoes, sliced

Place the squirrel parts in an oven-proof dish. Add the onion, carrots and potatoes. In a separate bowl combine the soup with about ½ can water to dilute it. Mix well, then pour over the squirrel and vegetables. Cover with an oven-proof lid. Cook at 350 degrees for 1 to 1 ½ hours until tender and meat is easily removed from the bone.

This recipe also works well in a crockpot. Set the crockpot on low and cook for 4-5 hours.

Vegetables of your choice may also be added, such as peas or celery.

have never experienced the simple pleasure of a cold morning in the woods. Watching the forest come alive as we become one with nature, watching wildlife scurrying around and knowing that the animals are unaware that a human is among them is something very special. Listening for and identifying wildlife by sound can keep a person busy all day long."

Guy adds that other aspects of squirrel hunting are attractive to both young and old, both the experienced and the budding outdoors person.

"It's the simplicity that makes squirrel hunting so much fun," he said. "A .22 rimfire rifle, a licensed mentor, optional camo clothing, and a small patch of woods are all that are needed to start. With an experienced mentor by their sides, new hunters can become accomplished squirrel hunters very quickly. Hunting on foot or in a ground blind makes this style of hunting a great first experience for the new hunter as very little patience is required to see game.

"In the meantime, woodsmanship, observation and wildlife identification skills, and even patience are being built. Ultimately it is being comfortable in the woods and being patient that makes a great hunter. The Cape Fear River Branch of QDMA mentoring program helps to develop both."

Guy says the program was originally developed just for kids, but QDMA mentors quickly realized that getting and keeping the entire family involved is just as important, and they also learned that not all new hunters are kids. The organization's "Deer Camp" is open to anyone new to the sport and delivered at cost each fall. Group sizes are kept intentionally small so that individualized attention can be delivered. Students learn how to hunt deer safely and effectively, taking years off their learning curves.

This branch of QDMA also offers a workshop series to new hunters at the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission educational centers in Raleigh and Fayetteville: Practical Wildlife Habitat Management, Deer Hunting 101 and Practical Deer Processing: Field to Freezer. Sign up for one or more of these free seminars through the NCWRC website.

The Gardners say that volunteers at the Cape Fear River Branch encourage every experienced hunter to take some time to give back to their pastime, specifically to help a new hunter develop the patience and simple pleasures known only to those who hunt—and to begin that introduction by hunting for squirrels.

For more information: capefcarriverbranchqdma.org, judyg@capefcarriverbranchqdma.org, 919-250-8441.

Trophy Squirrels? Thankfully No

I told Brad Gunn, a former assistant chief of the division of wildlife management, that one of my favorite things about seeking out squirrels is that no such critter exists as a "trophy squirrel" and I'm further glad that these animals don't possess antlers or beards.

"When you're after squirrels, you don't have to wait for the 'big one' to come along," laughed Gunn. "You also don't have to worry about either-sex days. Another really appealing thing about gray squirrels is that they can be found just about everywhere by and large in North Carolina.

"Of course, squirrels are a great starter game animal for kids. If young hunters or their mentors mess up at one spot, they can just walk somewhere else and start all over again."

North Carolina's Long Season and Liberal Limits

In North Carolina, we can pursue gray squirrels from mid-October through the end of February with no season limit and a very liberal daily limit of eight.

"Traditionally, North Carolina has had a very long season for gray squirrels," said Gunn. "The long season probably goes back a hundred years or so when few deer and turkeys lived in the state, and many people hunted squirrels as a subsistence food.

"I'm in my early 50s and can remember as a boy when hunting for squirrels was very much a part of North Carolina's rural, cultural fabric. State residents younger than 40 probably don't realize that squirrels were once something folks ate three meals a day."

Indeed, fried squirrels with biscuits and gravy was once an entrée that was as likely to appear on state breakfast tables as it was on lunch and dinner ones. For more formal repasts, a mason jar of homemade blackberry jam adorned the table as well.

Tactics

Gunn said that he has two favorite ways to chase after squirrels.

"One of the most enjoyable ways to squirrel hunt is with a dog," he said. "Kids especially enjoy doing this as they can interact with the dog when the action is slow and at other times be thrilled when that dog chases a squirrel up a tree.

"The other way I find really pleasurable is still hunting. Slowly walking through the woods a few steps at a time, next stopping and scanning your surroundings, and then repeating those actions is something I really enjoy. The art of still hunting is also an important skill for beginning hunters to learn."

The ubiquitous gray squirrel was the first game animal targeted by many generations of hunters. Today, deer and turkey have taken the place of the squirrel in many instances.

SHAUN WILKINSON

Like Gunn, I really enjoy still hunting as well as going afield with a squirrel dog. But my favorite way to pursue this small game animal is to stand hunt, that is, selecting a location and committing to it for an hour or more. My favorite type of stand site is one between two types of habitat. For example, behind my house three superb squirrel locales exist.

One is a bottomland stand of hardwoods that borders a creek, the second is an oak/hickory forest that abuts a pine/cedar one, and the third is a long fencerow that features mature trees on one side and a horse pasture on the other. Young or novice hunters who learn that these three locales are examples of edge habitat have also just learned what sublime deer habitat looks like.

Developing Woodsmanship

Earlier, I wrote about killing my first squirrel while I was standing underneath a mockernut hickory tree. I didn't learn the name of that particular hardwood until sometime later when the thought dawned that there must be a reason why the gray had ascended high into that tree. Of course, the reason is that bushytails relish the sweet nuts of the mockernut just as they do many other hard and soft mast menu items.

I then began a mission to learn every species of flora and fauna that dwells in the region's forests—a quest that continues today and is not likely (thankfully) to ever end. As the seasons and years went by, I learned that squirrels relished not only the nuts from mockernut hickories but also those from the shagbark and pignut hickories as well. And if I wanted to observe a squirrel feeding frenzy, enter the woods the first few days after the wild black walnuts ripened.

I learned that though deer and turkeys did not share the squirrel's affinity for walnuts and hickory nuts, they did share the silvertail's fondness for white oaks (such as the white, post and chinquapin varieties) and red oaks (think the red, scarlet, black and pin varieties). I observed that grays, as well as turkeys, would dine on dogwood berries, grapes, cherries and paw paws in early fall and persimmons late in autumn. And a recently cut corn field could not only draw gray squirrels but also deer and turkeys as well as a host of other small game and non-game creatures. I'm a better woodsman today because squirrels made me curious about the woods three decades ago.

The gray squirrel is about as common a wild animal as there is and it is often ignored because of that fact. But Mr. Silvertail has much to offer us modern-day hunters, both grizzled veterans of the forest and apple-cheeked boys and girls. ◆

Bruce Ingram is the author of five books on river smallmouth fishing, among them "The New River Guide" and "Fly and Spin Fishing for River Smallmouths." To order and/or to read his weekly blog on the outdoors: bruceingramoutdoors.com.

The world's largest and oldest wildlife survey happens every year near you. You can participate, too, and

Count Birds for Christmas

written by Jeff Beane / illustrated by Amelia Hansen
nature activity by Anne M. Runyon

Every holiday season, tens of thousands of volunteers, mostly in the U.S. and Canada, but also in at least 15 other countries, brave cold, rain, wind and snow to participate in the Christmas Bird Count. The data they gather are used to assess the health of bird populations and guide conservation actions.

WHAT THEY ARE

Sponsored by the National Audubon Society, Christmas Bird Counts are held each year between Dec. 14 and Jan. 5. Their basic purpose is to census bird populations. Each regional count covers a "count circle" 15 miles in diameter, or about 177 square miles. Participants divide into small groups and each group covers a specific assigned portion of the circle as thoroughly as possible. They identify and count, to the best of their ability, every bird seen during their 24-hour count date. Participants may count birds all day, or for only a few hours. Some prefer to watch their feeders and report those results. Usually one person serves as coordinator, organizing participation, compiling data and submitting final results to National Audubon.

HOW THEY STARTED

Attitudes toward, and appreciation for, wildlife and conservation in this country have changed drastically over the years. In the 19th century, before there were laws protecting migratory birds, "side hunts" were a popular holiday tradition. Contestants would choose sides and see how many birds and other animals a team could shoot in a single day. Frank M. Chapman, a young ornithologist and early officer in the newly formed Audubon Society, was outraged by this senseless killing and waste of wildlife. In protest, on Christmas Day 1899, he counted live birds for three hours, publishing his results in the newly created *Bird-Lore* magazine (which later became *Audubon*), and encouraged other bird lovers to do the same. The next year, 1900, the first national count was held, with 27 participants counting in 25 locations across the U.S. and Canada.

Each year since then, the Christmas Bird Counts, or CBCs, have grown. Well over 2,000 regional counts are now held, with over 70,000 participants. About 40 are held in North Carolina. This year's 116th annual count promises to be the biggest yet.

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT

CBCs are among the best data sources we have on bird populations. They can depict trends and population fluctuations over time. They are also the best-known citizen science projects in the world — allowing ordinary citizens to gather data that contribute to the overall body of our knowledge about birds. The counts certainly have their flaws and shortcomings. Not every part of a count circle can be covered. Certainly not every bird gets seen or identified. Large flocks can't be counted precisely. It's hard to be sure that some birds don't get counted more than once. But the sheer volume of information and the consistency of holding the counts in the same places, during the same seasons, often with the same participants counting in the same fashion, year after year, make the data very valuable. Studies have shown that CBC data correlate closely with those gathered using more rigorous scientific methods. Hundreds of peer-reviewed articles have been published in scientific journals using analyses done with CBC data. State and federal agencies also use the information to make important bird conservation decisions.

WHY THEY'RE FUN

CBCs are good opportunities to learn about birds from skilled and knowledgeable birders. They are also social events, where birders can make new friends or spend time with old ones. These are the biggest reasons that many people participate. Many counts have special traditions, including lunches, dinners and countdown parties during which data are compiled and stories are shared. Some even have their own T-shirts. The Raleigh CBC's annual potluck dinner, the venison chili and pralines usually to be had at the Southern Pines count, and the Key lime pie and seafood featured at the tally rally following the Ocracoke and Portsmouth counts, will be enough to keep you coming back. But even better are the things you'll see and learn, and the friends and memories you'll make.

Get Outside

You can participate in your local Christmas Bird Count. Many are held each year in North Carolina between Dec. 14 and Jan. 5. Spring counts are also held in some of the same count circles in late April and early May. For information on counts near you, contact your local Audubon chapter.

If you don't know birds very well, you can still be placed with a team of good birders and help by spotting birds for them to identify, or by helping them keep their list. Birding with experts is one of the best ways to learn. Even if you don't participate in an organized count or project, birding is fun and educational in its own right, and is one of the easiest outdoor activities to get interested in, because you can watch birds anywhere. A pair of binoculars and a good field guide are all you need to get started. And you have all year to learn and practice for those Christmas Counts!

Read and Find Out

- "Atlas of Wintering North American Birds: An Analysis of Christmas Bird Count Data" by Terry Root, University of Chicago Press, 1988.

On the Internet:

- National Audubon Society: Christmas Bird Count: audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count
- A group for bird lovers in the Carolinas: carolinabirdclub.org
- Birding with a purpose—learn about bird citizen science projects:birdsource.org/index.html
  An online checklist program to count, report, and keep track of birds anytime, anywhere: ebird.org/content/cbird/
  The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and information on many bird projects:birds.cornell.edu/allaboutbirds

In *Wildlife in North Carolina:*

- "Out for the Count" by Jeff Beane, December 2006.

Find out more about Project WILD Workshops and literature at the Wildlife Commission's website at ncwildlife.org.

Count Birds for Christmas Ornaments

1) Copy the designs onto sturdy paper. Cardstock works well.

2) Cut them out and punch a hole at the top of each design.

3) Now sketch your own winter birds on the back of each ornament.

4) Add colorful string, and hang your winter birds on your Christmas tree.

back porch

NEWS *and* NOTES

Edited by Mike Zlotnicki

Whirling Disease Hits Trout Population

Following confirmation of whirling disease in rainbow trout from the Watauga River in North Carolina, biologists with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission are concerned about potential significant impacts the disease may have on other trout populations, in particular native brook trout populations.

The disease, which is caused by a parasite, affects all species of trout and salmon; however, rainbow and brook trout, two species found in North Carolina waters, appear to be the most susceptible. Brook trout is the only trout species native to North Carolina, and it lives mainly in colder waters, which is also the preferred habitat of the parasite.

BARRY NEHRING/AQUATIC WILDLIFE RESEARCHER (RETIRED), COLORADO DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

A brown trout from Colorado (above) shows the results of infection from the whirling disease parasite.

"The parasite that causes whirling disease has a highly complex life cycle, requiring two hosts in order to spread," said Doug Besler, the mountain region fisheries supervisor for the commission. "One of those hosts is a tubifex worm that thrives in colder water, which unfortunately, is the preferred habitat for brook trout, particularly our Southern Appalachian brook trout. If the disease showed up in one of those streams, the impacts could be damaging to those local brook trout populations."

Despite their concern, biologists acknowledge that the presence of whirling disease doesn't necessarily equate to a dramatic loss of fish, given that other states where the disease has been present in waters for decades have been able to manage the disease so that impacts on both wild and stocked trout haven't been nearly as devastating as previously thought.

"In the '90s, whirling disease was relatively new to many states and there was broad uncertainty about trout population impacts from whirling disease," said Besler. "Some western states, such as Montana, had substantial impacts from whirling disease early on, but many of those populations have since rebounded. On the other hand, some Eastern states, such as Pennsylvania, do not appear to have experienced broad scale population level impacts from whirling disease."

"In waters where whirling disease is found, how an outbreak affects trout populations depends on many factors in addition to water temperatures, such as the species of trout present and the quality and quantity of the substrate where the intermediate host resides," he added.

Biologists, however, aren't taking a wait-and-see approach to how whirling disease will impact North Carolina trout populations. They are taking every precaution to limit the spread of the disease now.

While the diseased fish came from a trout stream that was not stocked with trout raised at one of three commission-owned hatcheries, commission staff suspended all trout stockings until hatchery fish could be tested and determined to be free of the disease. In mid-August the commission resumed stocking Hatchery Supported trout waters after receiving confirmation that trout from Armstrong State Fish Hatchery in Marion and Setzer State Fish Hatchery in Brevard had tested negative for whirling disease.

Commission staff have been collecting trout from the Watauga River and tributary streams to test for whirling disease and to determine its distribution in the watershed. The N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and N.C. State University are working with the commission to sample commercial aquaculture operations in the area where the infected trout were found.

The disease is spread mainly by infected fish and fish parts. However, it also can be transmitted by birds as well as by anglers who may transfer the microscopic parasite that causes the disease, *Myxobolus cerebralis*, on their fishing equipment, boots and boats.

e NEWSLETTER

Get N.C. Wildlife Update—news including season dates, bag limits, legislative updates and more—delivered to your Inbox from the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. Sign up at ncwildlife.org/enews.

Anglers moving infected fish from one water body to another water body may also transmit the disease.

"Anyone stocking fish in North Carolina is required to have a stocking permit from the commission, and we encourage anyone considering stocking trout to obtain one," Besler said. "The primary purpose of that permit system is to allow our biological staff the opportunity to review the stocking application for potential negative impacts to the environment, including the potential to spread invasive organisms. Unauthorized stockings have a much higher potential for serious environmental consequences."

Besler added that preventing the introduction of unwanted aquatic invasive organisms into North Carolina is the single best approach because control options are often very limited or ineffective once an introduction has occurred.

The parasite that causes whirling disease is native to Europe and was introduced into North America, likely through frozen fish imported from Europe. It was first discovered in 1956 in Pennsylvania and, since then, it has been reported in more than 20 states and continues to spread.

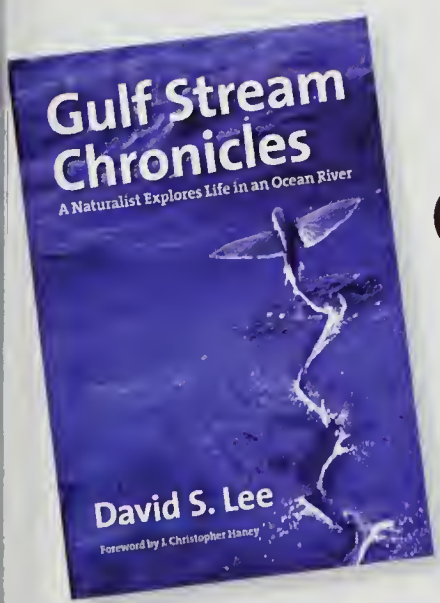
Along with testing fish at its hatcheries, commercial aquaculture operations, and trout streams, the commission is asking the public to help prevent the spread of the disease by:

- Cleaning and drying equipment, clothing and anything else that comes into contact with water;
- Never moving fish or aquatic life from one body of water to another without first obtaining a permit from the commission;
- Disposing of fish parts carefully after cleaning fish by putting fish parts in the garbage, burying them deeply or burning them completely.

Anglers are asked to contact the commission if they observe deformities, strange swimming behaviors, or other signs of disease in trout.

For a list of frequently asked questions on whirling disease, to learn more about whirling disease and its effects on trout, and to report signs of disease in trout visit the commission's dedicated webpage, ncwildlife.org/whirlingdisease. The page will be updated as test results become available. The commission also will post information on its Facebook page, Twitter page and enewsletter, N.C. Wildlife Update.

Lee Chronicles Gulf Stream Wonders



Off the shore of Hatteras Island, where the inner edge of the Gulf Stream flows northward over the outer continental shelf, the marine life is unlike that of any other area in the Atlantic. Here the powerful ocean river helps foster an extraordinarily rich diversity of life, including Sargassum mats concealing strange creatures and exotic sea beans, whales and sea turtles, sunfish and flying fish, and shearwaters and Bermuda petrels. During his long career as a research scientist, the late David S. Lee made more than 300 visits to this area off the North Carolina coast, documenting its extraordinary biodiversity. In "Gulf Stream Chronicles," a collection of 20 linked essays, Lee draws on his personal observations and knowledge of the North Atlantic marine environment to introduce us to the natural wonders of an offshore treasure.

Lee, a long-time contributor to *Wildlife in North Carolina,* guides readers on adventures miles offshore and leagues under the sea, blending personal anecdotes with richly detailed natural history, local culture and seafaring lore. These journeys provide entertaining and informative connections between the land and the diverse organisms that live in the Gulf Stream off the coast of North Carolina. Lee also reminds us that ocean environments are fragile and vulnerable to threats such as pollution, offshore energy development and climate change, challenging those of us on land to consider carefully the costs of ignoring sea life that thrives just beyond our view.

Young Anglers Pocket Lifetime Licenses

Faith Duncan

Hannah Ball

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, along with Neuse Sport Shop and the N.C. Council of Trout Unlimited, presented two young anglers with lifetime licenses at the agency's business meeting in Raleigh in August.

Hannah Ball, 12, of Deep Run in Lenoir County, received her unified lifetime sportsman license, and Faith Duncan, 10, of Madison in Rockingham County, received her lifetime comprehensive inland fishing license as part of a statewide drawing for participants in 36 kids' "Fish for Fun" events, which were held earlier this summer in celebration of National Fishing and Boating Week 2015.

In addition to Hannah and Faith, 150 other young anglers across the state won fishing-related prizes — from rods and reels and tackle boxes courtesy of Neuse Sport Shop to mini-tackle boxes, fishing towels and fish playing cards from the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

Wildlife Commission Vice-Chairman (now Chairman) John Litton Clark presented Hannah and Faith with their certificates. The unified lifetime sportsman license is valued at $675 and was paid for by Neuse Sport Shop. The lifetime comprehensive inland fishing license is valued at $250 and was paid for by Trout Unlimited.

Since 2001, the commission, along with partners Neuse Sport Shop, Trout Unlimited and the U.S. Forest Service, has helped coordinate free fishing events across the state during National Fishing and Boating Week to promote fishing as a fun, family-friendly activity. For more information on fishing in North Carolina's public, inland waters, visit the commission's fishing page or call the Inland Fisheries Division, 919-707-0220.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Friday–Saturday, Dec. 4–5

The 7th Annual WNC Fly Fishing Expo will be held at the WNC Agricultural Center in Fletcher. This two-day fly-fishing extravaganza provides anglers a forum to sharpen their skills and learn about the latest innovations in their sport. The expo will feature local fly shops, angling organizations and fly-fishing art, while companies such as Simms, Orvis, Scientific Anglers, Flymen Fishing and Sage will showcase the newest gear for 2016. The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission also will have a booth at the expo. Visit wncflyfishingexpo.com for more information.

Saturday–Sunday, Dec. 5–6

Harkers Island comes to life the first full weekend in December each year as the Core Sound Decoy Guild holds its annual Core Sound Decoy Festival. Attractions include antique decoy exhibits, retriever demonstrations and competitions. Go to decoyguild.com for details. The Core Sound Waterfowl Weekend at the Core Sound Museum runs concurrently with the decoy festival. Visit coresound.com for more information.

Readers should check with the contact listed before traveling to an event. Items for listing should be conservation- oriented and should be submitted at least four months in advance to mike.zlotnicki@ncwildlife.org, or call 919-707-0175.

LIFETIME LICENSES

Help conserve wildlife for future generations. In 1981, hunters, anglers and wildlife enthusiasts became shareholders in an innovative investment and conservation program called the North Carolina Wildlife Endowment Fund.

Today, the commission has 19 different lifetime licenses in five categories: Infant, Youth, Adult, Senior and Disabled.

The endowment fund for wildlife was a simple yet revolutionary idea: Create a lifetime inland fishing or hunting license. Put the license fees into a special fund. Spend the accrued interest, not the principal, on programs and projects that benefit fish and wildlife. To learn more or to purchase a lifetime license visit ncwildlife.org/licensing or call 1-888-248-6834.

N.C. Youth Teams Beat the World

Youth teams affiliated with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission emerged as junior and senior division champions at the 30th annual International Youth Hunter Education Challenge (YHEC), a shooting and outdoors skills competition at the NRA Whittington Center in Raton, N.M.

Top: Forbush High School Raptors, Senior winners; Yadkin Middle School Patriots, Junior winners.

The National Rifle Association event was held July 26–31. Teams from across the country competed in marksmanship with .22 rifles and black powder rifles at knock-down targets, shotgun on a sporting clays course, and archery at 3-D game targets. Non-shooting events included orienteering, wildlife identification, hunter responsibility exam, and a hunter safety trail test.

The Forbush Raptors of Forbush High School won the senior division with a team roster consisting of Coach Chris Poplin and student competitors Colton Bullin, Jordan Dinkins, Dylan Horn, Dylan Poplin, Jordan Yale and Emry Wingler.

The Yadkin Patriots of Forbush Middle School won the junior division with a team roster consisting of Coaches Carson Hobson and Brian Poindexter, and student competitors Colton Hanes, Matthew Lineberry, Clayton Medlin, Zack Norman and Garrett Poindexter. Both schools are in Yadkin County.

Nearly 340 competitors, coaches and parents attended YHEC this year. Since its inception in 1985, YHEC has reached more than a million young men and women. For more information, go to ncwildlife.org/huntered.

New Leadership for Commissioners

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission unanimously elected a new chairman and vice-chairman during its business meeting in July to preside over the governing board of the state regulatory agency.

John Litton Clark

John T. Coley IV

John Litton Clark, of Clinton and the District 4 commissioner, will serve as chairman. John T. Coley IV, of Holly Springs and a Governor At-Large Appointee, will serve as vice chairman.

Clark replaces James W. Cogdell of Norwood, who is the District 6 commissioner. Coley replaces Clark, the newly elected chairman.

The 19-member Commission establishes policies and regulations governing boating, hunting, trapping and inland fishing, and wildlife-conservation activities in North Carolina. Appointments to the Commission are made by the Governor, the Speaker of the State House and the President Pro Tempore of the N.C. Senate, with commissioners serving until reappointed or replaced.

As required by General Statute, at the first scheduled meeting after July 1 of each odd-numbered year, wildlife commissioners must select a chairman and a vice-chairman, who then serve for terms of two years or until their successors are elected and qualified.

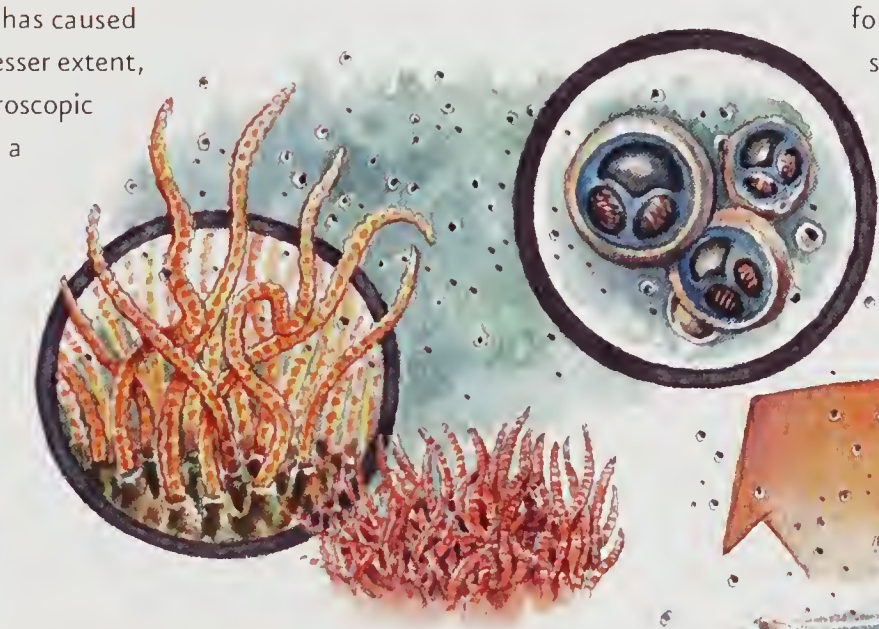
More information on wildlife commissioners, meeting schedules and actions, and public hearings, is available at ncwildlife.org/about.

What Kind of Organism Causes Whirling Disease?

written by Clyde Sorenson
illustrated by Jim Brown

CRIPPLED TROUT: WHIRLING DISEASE IS A POTENTIALLY DEVASTATING DISEASE OF TROUT AND SALMON, recently detected in North Carolina. In other states, it has caused tremendous mortality among rainbow, brown, and, to a lesser extent, brook trout. The organism that causes this disease is microscopic and apparently simple, and for years, it was considered a protozoan. However, it's actually an extraordinary animal related to the jellyfish and corals, and it has quite a complicated life cycle for such a seemingly uncomplicated creature.

In order for a trout to become infected by this organism, a tubifex worm living in the sediment on the bottom of the stream must first become infected. Myxosporean spores released from the decomposing body of a dead trout invade the worm; after three or four months, they transform into the form that produces the stage that can infect fish.



MYXOSPOREAN SPORES

TUBIFEX WORMS

DECOMPOSING TROUT

TRIACTINOMYXON SPORE

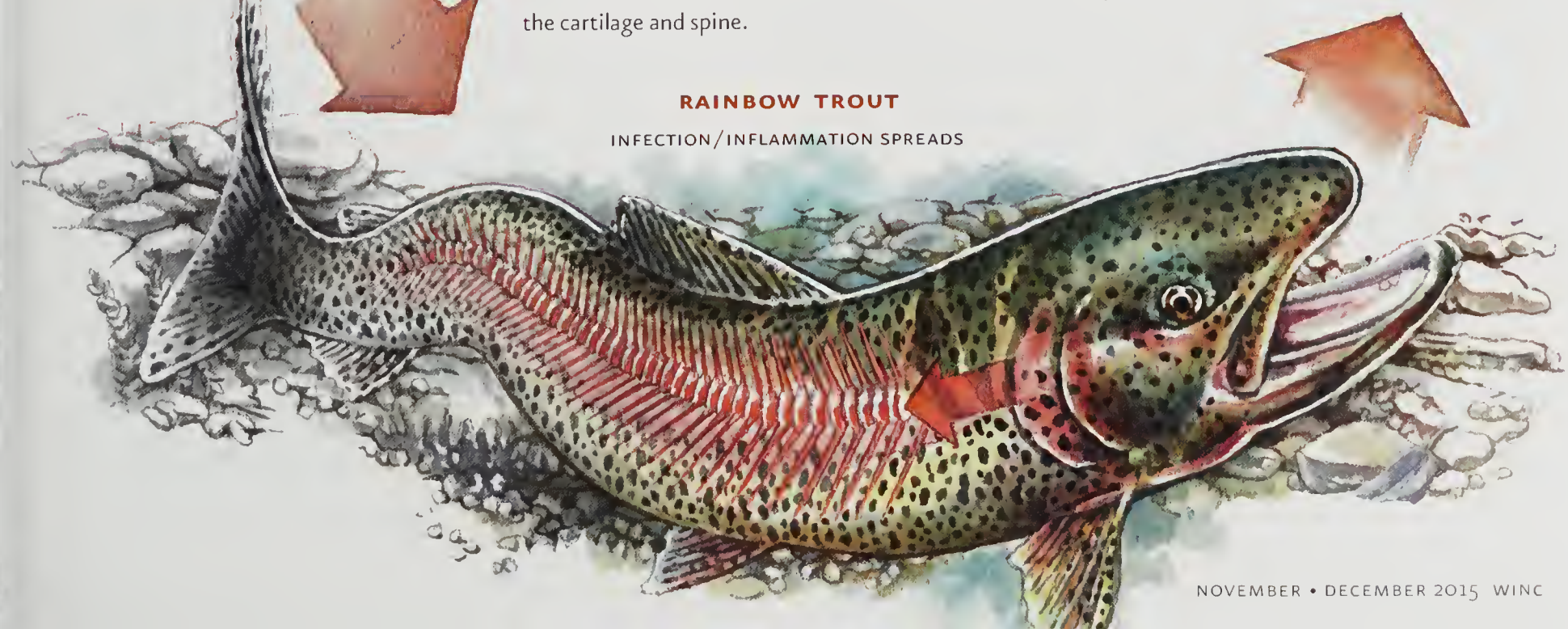
The spore form that infects fish is called a triactinomyxon — a strange, four-pronged creature. The central prong contains a packet of infective cells; when a fish eats an infected worm or comes in contact with a triactinomyxon, the packet is shot into the fish's tissue.

Over the next few months, the infective cells migrate to the cartilage in the fish's skeleton, where they transform again in to the myxosporean spore-forming stage. This is when the damage to the fish's skeleton occurs; the inflammation from the infection distorts the cartilage and spine.

The deformed spinal column often presses on the swim bladder, and the fish has trouble swimming, or feeding, normally, resulting in its premature death. The dead trout releases myxosporeans into the water, starting the cycle anew.

RAINBOW TROUT

INFECTION/INFLAMMATION SPREADS



The Timberdoodle Option

written by Jim Dean

We still see old calendars now and then that remind us of the glory days. A stylish English setter or pointer is staunchly locked tail high on point in a field of soybeans or broomstraw. Coming up behind are the hunters with classic double-barreled shotguns already swinging on the blur of wild bobwhites blowing out of the undergrowth in a thunder of wings. Across much of the rural South, this once common scene is little more than a cherished memory these days—the proud traditions seemingly gone with the wind.

JIM DEAN

It's a sad tale apparently destined to wind down to an inevitable end, although not everyone is waiting to read a final chapter yet to be writ. Many hunters still hold out hope for wild bobwhites, still seek their dwindling company if they can find them, and still support research and management that might yet yield some miracle—realistically not widespread restoration with so much loss of habitat, but something at least modestly sustainable.

In many ways, our family farm in Granville County is a microcosm of this loss. It is still a mix of rolling fields, ponds, woods, cutovers and bottomlands with corn, wheat, soybeans and tobacco grown on about the same number of acres for a century. Unlike many families, we have been fortunate to hold on, but our farm is increasingly an island in a sea of change, and the impacts on our wildlife have been significant. As late as the 1970s, I could count six or seven coveys here, but their numbers were already declining. Until about 10 years ago, a few remnant pairs of bobwhites still swapped their whistling calls in spring and summer. But our farm—and much of gentleman Bob's original range—has now lost its sweet choir.

"As late as the 1970s, I could count six or seven coveys here, but their numbers were already declining"

Hunters can still go after planted pen-raised quail on pay-to-hunt preserves, but some upland diehards believe there's a more satisfying option—a quarry that generously preserves at least the spirit, if not the feathered body, of their first wild fling.

The bird they're targeting is the woodcock, also called timberdoodle, and a curious and wonderful creature it is, too. These wild migratory upland birds begin to wing their way south from New England to the Gulf States every fall, passing through North Carolina usually in mid- to late winter where they may linger anywhere from a week or so to a month or more. They feed mostly in woods and bottomlands where the cover is often thick, and the soil soft enough for them to use their long bills to root out the earthworms that are their favorite meal.

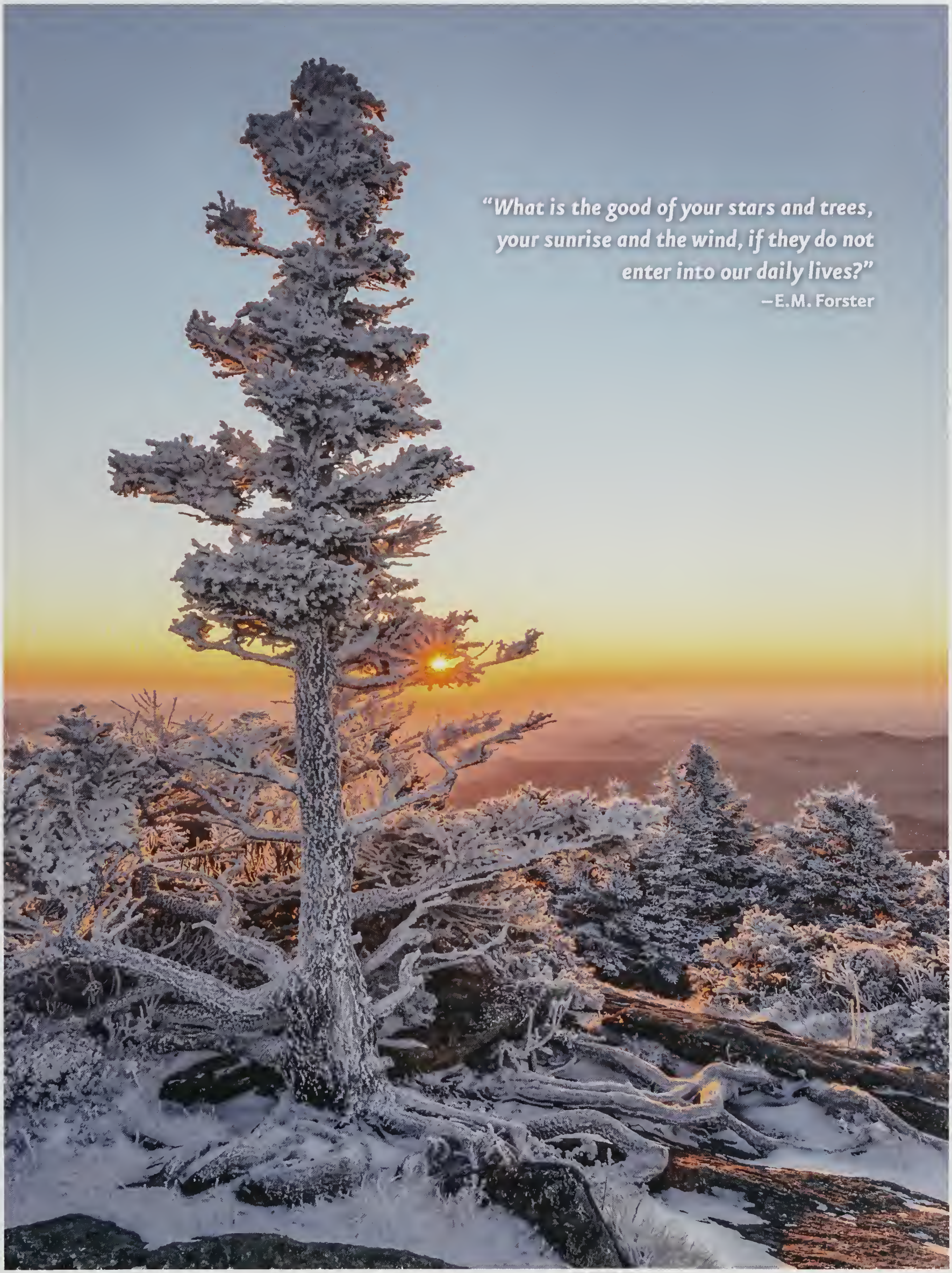
Some North Carolina hunters eagerly await their arrival, knowing that these are fine game birds that deserve the high regard paid them in their northern range. And even though timberdoodles are most often considered targets of opportunity here, upland enthusiasts still stay on the lookout for them.

Dogs trained on bobwhites readily point timberdoodles, and they are tricky targets that typically flush vertically to rise over dense cover before winging away. While they do not form coveys, there are often enough of them to provide interesting and challenging sport. Furthermore, they are very good to eat with a faintly liverish flavor. I'd personally rather have a brace of them on my plate than any other game bird. In an odd reversal of the norm, their breast meat is dark, while their leg meat is white. In their northern range, some hunters swear that they are even better cooked without removing the "trail," or entrails.

Almost every winter, enough timberdoodles hang around long enough on our farm to provide some sport, and my friend Mike Gaddis and his good dogs arrange their affairs to greet them. In years past, I have hunted here with him, looking for "chalk," the telltale white splotches of their droppings that foretell their arrival. We usually expect to find them in the bottomlands and along the sides of wooded ridges. I don't recall finding many in fields.

I have also hunted these birds in other parts of the state from the Coastal Plain well into the Piedmont. Before Lake Jordan was impounded years ago, the bottomlands along New Hope Creek afforded prime woodcock habitat, and Frank Barick (then chief of the Wildlife Commission's Division of Game) used to take Ted Dossett and me to hunt there. Usually, we found lots of timberdoodles, and we would occasionally also flush a Wilson's snipe, a long-billed smaller cousin of the woodcock more common farther east.

Speaking of snipe, the only other time I recall hunting them was in 1953 at Camp Seagull. I was invited by my cabin mates to go on a snipe hunt, and further honored to be the "bag man." As gullible as I was, I could hardly believe that any snipe would dart into my bag. I quickly got bored waiting in the woods and returned to the cabin. Desperate, skeeter-bitten search parties looked for me for hours until somebody found me reading a book. Served them right.



SKIP SICKLER

Sunrise on Grandfather Mountain

OUTDOOR MOMENT

IN THE JANUARY · FEBRUARY ISSUE

IMGORTHAND

BEST IN SHOW
We present the winners of our 11th annual photo competition. See more than 30 great photographs representing 10 categories.

THE LITTLE BROWN PUP
Despite the doubts of fellow duck hunters, a small retriever proves to have a big heart.

HUNTING WITH A TWIST
An erstwhile hunter discovers the pleasures of jump shooting ducks with his camera.

FIND US ON THE WEB AT ncwildlife.org

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